

BÈLLA DONNA.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUNDAY FEAST.

NOT on the high road, with two mounted travellers of elderly or youthful aspect trotting leisurely along; nor yet at the inn-door, or inn-window, where the gallant Alexandre the Elder sets his boisterous Gentlemen of the Guard; not by the death-bed of the lady of high degree, who has just brought our hero into the world; and ~~not~~ ⁱⁿ in my lady's boudoir, where she is gossiping pleasantly with her female friend and counsellor, *a secretis*. Not with any of these traditional precedents does this chronicle set out upon its march. It may not boast the Lord Mayor's show, and gorgeously appointed procession, to which romances of grander lineage are entitled as of right. This is but a simple narrative, which must be helped along without such brilliant properties and decorations. So it starts off one Sunday afternoon, when the Franklyn family are giving a sort of sober Sunday ban-

quet in the dining-room of their old mansion down at Grey Forest.

At this sacred festival were assembled the whole Franklyn family then on the premises, as well as such neighbours whose function or position gave them a title to be present. The room which was the scene of such delightful intercourse took up the whole lower front of the right wing, which bulged out in a corpulent bow, running full up to the roof, which overshadowed it, like the flaps of an old-fashioned waistcoat. And there being another wing also suffering from dropsy, and perfectly symmetrical furnished also with its waistcoat and flaps, the two were joined together by a central strip of building, much like that band of flesh which united the two Siamese gentlemen who visited this country many years ago. It was, in fact, a sound, old-fashioned country-house, not nearly old enough to be shown, or to have priests' hiding-places, or embayed windows, or any of the theatricals of old mansions; but of sufficient antiquity to be uncomfortable, and so far advanced in life as to be old-fashioned.

This parlour, where the decent Sunday revel was going forward, was painted in a tawny buff, which intruded wherever the pictures did not hide the walls. These were but feeble ancestors at the best—in bottle but a generation or two—with a coloured coat and a wig or so among them, yet scarcely of the proper ancestor pattern. The furniture, too, was of a bald meagre order, with sharp edges, and vast expanse of rude horsehair; while at the upper end of the room in the archway was erected a sideboard structure, whose superincumbent weight, furnished with abundance of brass railing, was supported on thin insufficient spikes, by way of legs, which seemed to

push vindictively into the carpet, like a row of single elderly ladies' parasols. This piece of architecture will be a key to the whole tone of the other decorations of the apartment. A key, too, to the tone of the Franklyn family, which came of that decent country-house stock, which is always a few hundred yards, or so, behind the rest in the great procession of civilisation.

Mr. Franklyn—Joseph Franklyn, Esquire, of Grey Forest—sits at the head of the table, in one of the skeleton arm-chairs, whose arms curl under his elbows like rams' horns. He is a widower, and there is no Mrs. Franklyn. A quiet gentleman, timorous, not overloaded with language, and enjoying habitually a steady flow of low spirits. Present, also, were his two daughters, pleasant, elegant castings from the average young lady mould; his son, Captain Charles Franklyn—a soldier, home on leave after a three years' service in India—a youth with curly, bay-coloured hair, a fair face, and sly retiring moustaches, who would become more brazen by-and-by—rather tall and thin, and a little loosely put together. Present, too, Miss Jenny Bell, a distant and very indistinct relation, who has been with the Franklyn family some months, on a delicate debatable footing. Present, also, a loose miscellany, medico-venatico-ecclesiastical; the Venerable Archdeacon Dilly, Doctor Splorters, the Reverend Henry Blowers, M.A., Incumbent of Grey Forest, with his curate, the Reverend Charlton Wells; young Tilbury, the Gentleman-Grazier; and "Bobus" Noble, as he was called, who lived astride of his horse, during the day bodily, and at meal-times metaphorically, nearly all the year round. Thus it will be seen here was the chief, sitting at the head of his wigwam; and, to put it

delicately, there was an air of official connection between the chief and the gentlemen collected at his board. They were cheerful, and, perhaps, ever so slightly, uproarious. For their hearts were glad, and the week's labour was done, and the day's 'sanctification' was happily through, and the chief had graciously bidden them to his wigwam. There was another Miss Franklyn, eldest of the girls, who was not present, but away on a visit, but would be home again in a few days.

The ministering menials tramped round and about, in and out of the room, with much good-will, and, perhaps, still more noise. They came in somewhat unruly procession, bearing the huge "pieces of resistance," which were to make the parasol legs of the sideboard quiver uneasily. There was much shifting of these burdens from arms awkward to arms less awkward, with the attendant perils, and hasty clutchings and shiftings of the huge cover, with noisy metallic din. For even in these elements and *personnel* of the retainers were found more helps to that tone in which the Franklyn family lived. For here was the septuagenarian butler, much bent, and generally decayed, and even indistinct of utterance, yet jealous of his dignity, and intolerant to his coadjutor, who had been artfully and benevolently furnished to him. Here was this bony pink-checked menial, whose coat of office came in flowing folds about his knees—exceptionally tolerated at these feasts of greater grandeur, as a useful supernumerary, yet, perhaps, more at home upon his box, with whip and reins in his hands. Yet he is willing and even eager; and with no special duty allotted to him, carries on a guerilla and predatory warfare of his own, swooping down upon loose plates, and knives, and glasses.

On the outskirts hover beings of questionable shape and figure, mortals but ill at ease in their adventitious trappings, and whom even the charitable must dimly associate with the ostler interest. These *cagots*, whose position is undefined, are victims of a monstrous and galling tyranny, and from behind the parlour-door are wafted at times sounds of suppressed suffering and hostile altercation.

Grand heir-looms of the Franklyn family decorated the table. An ancient epergne of solid silver, and a little stooped and bent, like the septuagenarian butler, glorified the centre. To it nodded homage a series of chandeliers, with twisted and curled branches, also unsteady and precarious in their balance. On the sideboard, stately pillar-lamps diffused a sickly gloom, not unmingled with a suspicion of oily infragrance, owing to some interior irregularity.

Mr. Archdeacon was pleasantly shouldering his ecclesiastical crutch, and showing how clerical fields were won. A dry caked face, that had been well in the ovens of human life, with sharp eyes, that were always peering and looking diligently after his men. He was always trudging diligently round his sacred preserves, poking the covers with his foot, and keeping a wary eye upon his under-keepers. He was always on the beat, as it were, carrying a loaded "charge" upon his shoulder, which he let off in print annually. At this moment he was, by anticipation, exploding some of its contents directly into Mr. Joseph Franklyn's person; while the Reverend Mr. Blowers, seated close by, looked on and listened with delight.

Archdeacon Dilly can be heard lamenting the alarming

spread of Dissent-rampant. For of the gentle passive shape of difference from the Establishment, he was amiably tolerant; but for these rude and boisterous anarchists he had no love. They were the disreputable game-stealers, the brazen pbachers of society, who cast on the authorised keepers the disagreeable duty of awkward encounters and violent scuffles. "We cannot be too much on our guard, my dear Blowers," said Mr. Archdeacon, again directing a portion of his "charge" full into the bosom of his subordinate, "against these ravening wolves. The hydra head of Dissent is again lifting itself; it grows apace in strength, and will tax all our energies. I cannot, therefore, caution you too much, my dear friends, to be on your guard against this dangerous monster who now walks abroad with an astonishing effrontery." With the close of these remarks the Archdeacon, with a gentle pressure, cracked a walnut with the proper instrument, as though it had been a Dissenter's head. Then delicately picking out the crushed portions of the brain of the unhappy dissentient, he consumed him with relish, leaving the fractured portions of the cranium on his plate.

Later on we see the quiet head of the Franklyn family drawing over his chair nearer to Mr. Archdeacon. "I wished to consult you," he said, a little nervously, "about a rather important matter. You have such an aptitude for business, and know the world so well, whereas I am as helpless as a child."

"Do you speak of the Endowment? It is sadly wanted, and your neighbourhood is destitute—very destitute." and with the word "destitute" another Dissenting skull was fractured, "and——"

"No, no," said the other; "we are too poor for that as yet. But there is a young person staying with us, a sort of a—kind of a relation, who has been left an orphan. And you know something is expected to be done under such circumstances."

"I understand," said Mr. Archdeacon; "wishes to earn her bread, as it is called."

"No, no," said Mr. Franklyn, hastily, "not quite that. You see she wishes to go out into the world, and be with a respectable family, on a peculiar footing, you understand."

Mr. Archdeacon shook his head.

"There is no debatable ground in these matters. Let her subscribe to the formularies or not; but let there be no reservation."

"But this is not a question bearing on the Church," said Mr. Franklyn, timorously.

"I was speaking figuratively," said Mr. Archdeacon; "possibly you misapprehended me; possibly I failed to convey myself."

"We had great hopes," said Mr. Franklyn, "that something was going forward between her and Mr. Blower's young curate. At least, until lately. A most desirable thing it would be."

"Do you mean young Wells?" said Mr. Archdeacon. "Surely no; you can't mean that unbeneficed young clergyman. Surely not. I hope not—I sincerely hope not. It is not at all desirable, let me tell you, Mr. Franklyn, that these sort of impoverished alliances should be encouraged in the Church. It don't do, Sir; and I must speak with young Wells on the subject, without loss of time."

"It has not gone so far as that," said Mr. Franklyn, with much trepidation. "Dear me, no. It is only some of the foolish stories of the parish, and——"

"There should be no foolish stories in the parish," said Mr. Archdeacon; "I don't consider a parish healthy where there are foolish stories."

"I was saying," said the other, "that has not gone beyond our own house and family; at least, it is from the girls only that I have heard it. Dear, no! there can be nothing in it—nothing!"

"Where is she?" said Mr. Archdeacon, abruptly. "Did I see her when I came in?"

"She is sitting," said Mr. Franklyn, mysteriously, "low down towards the end of the table on this side, next my son;" and the two heads, the lay and archidiaconal, bent over and looked down the sweep of the table, across the twisted arms of the ancient epergne, to the place indicated.

CHAPTER II.

JENNY BELL.

THIS was the figure they saw at the bottom of the table, sitting next Mr. Franklyn's son. That lively and engaging youth was fighting his tropical battles over again, and the face of Miss Jenny Bell, his neighbour, with eyes cast down, was turned towards him, absorbing every word of the magic tale. This was a round, blooming, fresh face, with brown hair, brought very low upon

the forehead, and laid on, as a painter would, in rich underflakes, as low indeed as is seen in a westerly Irish peasant girl. The light from the crane necks of the old twisted chandeliers seemed to fall on it, and glisten like delicate splashes of molten silver.

Mr. Archdeacon, though a spiritual man, and with something of the appreciation of the oyster in all matters sentimental, took notice of her full sleepy eyes, brown also, and (this, of course, privately within himself) of a roundness in the figure of Miss Jane Bell. For she is not of the company of immaterial virgins, who are spiritualised away by the macerations of romance, and who, by an unaccountable prejudice, are always sought out to play "first woman" in five-act dramas of Della Crusca. She was no misplaced angel, who had been shifted by cruel mistake into these pastures of earth; who was in daily protest against the unspiritual blessings of sound health and enjoyment, or was revelling in the blessings of a weak sickly frame and feeble constitution. Jenny Bell was piquant, fresh, and fair.

Had that soldier boy of the House of Franklyn, beside her, been merely an absorbed curate, or the tragick at all savoured of the ecclesiastical, so as to make it worth the trouble to consider it seriously, Mr. Archdeacon might have abstracted himself temporarily from his preserves, and bethought himself seriously what absorbing matter they could be so busy with. But it would have been poor matter for clerical digestion, being merely a stream of speech from the young soldier, who prattled with all the ingenuous ardour of fighting men of tender years, and with that personality for which they are remarkable. She listened devoutly, with downcast eyes,

and with glowing cheeks. In that light from the twisted chandeliers, she looked a refreshing bit of colour, beside whom the others seemed faded, insipid sketches, washed in with water colours. She was round and fresh as a piece of ripe fruit. Long had it been since he had found so rapt a listener for those empty narratives of his, which were of the common pipe-clay order, and not worthy of embalming in any shape.

But there was a tone and enthusiasm in this military improvisatore, which lifted it above a mere vulgar yarn. For him the tawny walls of the ancient dining-room, with its spindle furniture, was filled with floating clouds of a golden glory. With the gay scene spread out behind, and the players all in their theatrical suits, and ladies all decorated with flowers and ornament, and rising from a delicate white froth of muslin, with a little sparkling *mousseux* stream flowing steadily, sufficient to raise human pulsations a little above the cold orderly motions of common life—with these adjuncts the Sunday festival in the country house becomes a welcome gala; the tongue begins to dance, yet not in the vulgar sense; and that little boy, whom we hear so much of in the mythology, if by any chance he be lodging in the mansion, begins his wildest tricks. Into this house of Grey Forest, seat of Joseph Franklyn, Esq., it was very plain he was residing, a welcome and an honoured guest.

This sort of duet or fantasia of the affections, is sweet music enough for the two performers; but others, who sit at a distance, and see that there is music going forward, yet cannot hear, are usually by no means warm dilettanti. Save, indeed, the virtuous, aged, and "noble fathers," who look with the professional smile of be-

nignity on the tender gambols of the "young people." In the country districts, there is a pastoral simplicity which is not too nice in construing the formalities of the *ars amoris*; and a greater licence is tolerated, as, perhaps, outside the jurisdiction of the court of Hymen. Perhaps it was from some such feeling, or from a dulness induced by association with the flocks and herds, and properties of nomad life, that the Franklyn family took no special heed of this relation between their humble cousin and their brother.

But there was another, who sat just opposite—a pale, yet manly face, with a high forehead, from which, at one corner, the hair was wearing slowly away; from whose cheeks blossomed out a rich underwood of dark whisker; one of those faces we see sometimes in the ranks barristerial, and but rarely growing from the calyx of the white-tie professional. His sharp, piercing eyes, roamed to and fro uneasily, but usually returned to settle in a steady painful gaze upon the two delighted and unconscious musicians before him; and though he shammed a poor sort of make-believe, as if in lively and animated talk with a Franklyn girl who sat next to him, still there came uneasy twitches about his mouth, and sudden catchings at the table cloth, as some fresh burst of harmony from the orchestra opposite was borne to him. For the width of a dining-table is a strait almost as fatally impassable, at least as concerns time, as that of Dover. And this figure, thus standing on the shore, at the edge of the damasked sea, looking over so wistfully at the Promised Land, was the clergyman at whose proceedings the archidiaconal brow had contracted, and who was labouring under the disability of im-

poverishment, and the rich emoluments of a pauper curacy. This was the Reverend Henry Charlton Wells.

Perfectly true was the household legend rehearsed by timorous Mr. Franklyn to the Archdeacon—perfectly true in all details. The whole Franklyn family, but specially the girls, to whom it had been a pet *trouvaille*, welcomed it with, inexpressible delight. For, however reasonably may be questioned the ungallant aphorism, that every woman is a rake at heart, it is to be feared that they are walkers in the faith that lives by making of matches matrimonial; and, however mixed the common motives of human actions, here at least is a whole army of virgins and female confessors, perhaps, beyond the age of a tender female virginity, busy unselfishly with 'their neighbours' good, and preaching the sweet, sweet gospel, that it is not good for man to be alone.

This poor ecclesiastic—who had tramped through the usual university round laid out for promising ecclesiastics, of scholarships, prizes, senior wrangling, and such honours, with a dash of vigorous boating and muscular pastime; who had been known as "Wells of Maccabeus"—had happily reached to the goal of Orders, like many more of his brethren. Then falling to the Rev. Dr. Blowers as his clerical freedman, he might have been a happy Hod-man-in-orders, labouring, not indeed in the heats and rains, but with a calm tranquil round of duty, not by any means too distressing, beating the fields of his parish with a tranquil energy; dining at this house and that, made welcome in squires' society, and deeming, in his simple faith, that individual books upon his shelves were as much as friends, and had as complete an individuality as many of the parishioners, in which

perhaps he was not wholly astray. So that in this simple religion he might have lived for years, as well known along the district roads as was Parson Yorick; doing some little fishing, both in trout streams and in the greater human river (which latter was, however, the more profitable), until there came, in due course, the regular aureole, and he would be assumed into the seventh heaven of full rectorship. In short, a bright, healthy, vigorous young cleric, who might go on, careless and incurious, satisfied that Europe, Asia, and the other quarters of the globe, lay within his cure.

Suddenly, that distant connection of the Franklyn family, that bright and dangerous Miss Bell, who by deaths of proper guardians and reverses had become "chargeable to the parish," in a genteel way, was thrown upon the inhabitants of Grey Forest. The luckless curate came direct in her road. Loud was the twang of the bow. She did not very much mind what particular game was struck, so it might be called properly a random shot. Then was heard the crashing in the bushes, and down came the noble animal on its fore feet, stricken sorely. That was about twelve months before the Sunday Festival which brought together that company at Grey Forest, of which we now know something. It is not so difficult to see how matters stand during that ceremonial, looking at the way the parties are seated. The soldier has entered upon this Garden of Eden, say a month before, and yet here all the flowers have been trampled under his ugly hoof. And yet not by any mean sone of the professional captains, fitted out with letters of marque, among the gentler craft. Rather a poor frail barque, whom a skilful brother of his own cloth

would have shattered and sent to the bottom very speedily. Perhaps it was the flag, the scarlet flag; he carried at the fore, and the golden cordage, that bore him through so triumphantly. In a few hours, the plain, heavy sailing lugger of clerical build, was miles astern. It was cruel, but it is the story of every day.

CHAPTER III.

CROSS PURPOSES.

THERE they sit, the soldier and the lady who is "on the parish," side by side, and the poor ousted curate looking on from across the dining-room table. By the college of surgeons of the art of *live*, this sense of "ejection," this "eviction," and feoffment to a new tenant is held to be the most acute suffering, and the most difficult of treatment. On one side of him sits a girl of the house, Mary Franklyn, on whom he has been playing a sort of ghastly animation and strained gaiety; so that this undeveloped creature, some sixteen or seventeen years old only, thinks her fascinations have on a sudden prematurely burst out, and that she is already skilful with her gun. Some say that fine plump ecclesiastical bird, the curate of whatever degree and stipend, has ever a strange fascination for the female fowler. And this young country-house child could not but feel a pardonable pride at the thought of ensnaring her clergyman, which was pleasant sport enough. Sweeter

still, however, to the female breast is that sense of helping oneself to a neighbour's property.

But under Mr. Wells's spasmodic merriment was an utter weight of what might be called a spurious despair; for the crisis was not yet serious enough for the presence of the genuine passion. And at every fresh symptom of intimacy opposite, a hand seemed to gripe his heart with a sudden clutch which made him sink and collapse interiorly; yet that Miss Jenny Bell, still glowing with her electric light, was not cruel or barbarous. Often she turned to him with a look of encouragement; very often she appealed to him, and took him in graciously into her talk; yet these are but poor plasters to one with the clergyman's malady, which renders its victim marvellously quick-sighted, and had turned this "evicted" one, naturally simple, into a perfect Talleyrand. He saw through that complaisance of hers, which was done out of charity and sweet compassion, and it only wounded him more.

Hearken yet again to Mr. Archdeacon, far away at the top, now taking say his last round of claret before the ladies shall go.

"And so you like your new man of business," says he. "Suitable and satisfactory?"

"Perfectly," says Mr. Franklyn; "most wonderfully intelligent; has set all my affairs right; looks into everything; in short, I am quite pleased with him."

"Did I see *him* when I came in?" said Mr. Archdeacon, again raking the table inquisitively. "Ah I see, next young Wells. Ah, very good, v-ery good."

The new man of business was next Mr. Wells, but on

the other side; a man of business about whom there was nothing remarkable, saving, perhaps, his extreme youth for a man of business. But such a gay, light-souled, jocund creature, just, as we might say, let loose from his day-school, as innocent as a child, lively as a kitten, and positively stored to the brim with jokes, riddles, *coqs à l'âne*, and absolute nonsense, in which latter department he excelled; that was his main charm. Delightful man, Mr. Crowle—people said—charming man, Mr. Crowle.

So his little congregation found him; those that figuratively “sat under him,” and, according to the flesh, sat about him. Another Franklyn girl, who had a distrust of him at first, was forced into indecent bursts of merriment by his legends. And yet so young—only four or five-and-twenty, and looking not so old. And this man, such a profound man of business, closeted for these few days back with the head of the Franklyn family.

This jester did not move our pair by his antics beyond a polite smile, out of mere compliment. Our curate relished them, with an overdone and obstreperous merriment, truly melancholy to hearken to. He talks nonsense, rhapsody, and runs fragments of the dismal protests running in his head into the speeches which he pours out upon the Franklyn girl beside him; a piteous exhibition throughout.

And now the ladies glide away; and an eager gentleman, agile beyond the rest, holds the door handle, and smiles on the troop passing by him with a conscious smirk. This office does somehow bring with it this little pride, as though it had been won by personal

prowess, and the fair, passing by, were to drop wreaths upon his lance. Now do the surviving men, left with awkward gaps in the ranks, through their devotions, look round them doubtfully, and survey each other distrustfully, as is the manner of men who shall now have to form new connections. Slowly, however, they gather, as the head of the Franklyn family nervously invites his guests to "close up." Then he accumulated his decanters upon Mr. Archdeacon, hampering that gentleman's movements by a disorderly gathering of promiscuous vintages. Then he and Mr. Archdeacon fell again into confidential talk, on the outskirts of which Doctor Blowers skirmished uneasily. while the rest of the company, led by "Bobus" Noble and Mr. Crowle,—Philip Crowle, Esquire—chorussed it boisterously, and made of the claret jug a perfect vicious Wandering Jew, never suffering him to rest his weary foot an instant. The poor "evicted" curate, though actually between these two vociferous talkers, sat as it were apart, and smiled vacantly, where all the world was laughing boisterously. "Bobus" Noble had his heavy weight carrier, so well known with the Furzeby hunt, brought round, not actually in the flesh, but a sort of spectral steed; and mounted him there and then, and before the eyes of the company took him over the great "Haha" down at Gogby Corner; not content with which feat, he went through the whole of the events of that remarkable day, and insisted on the spectators riding with him over many miles of country.

Naturally the young man of business was indignant at being thus forced into the chase at so unseasonable a time. Nothing is so justly odious as this hunting

despotism, which justly rouses the abhorrence of every well-ordered mind in the community ; and yet the lively young man of business did not protest—did not struggle to fling off the yoke, but entered into the exciting incidents of the chase with true relish. This young man of business, though naturally anxious for his share of conversational glory, still had a wonderful sense of self-restraint, almost premature for his years. And so Mr. Tilbury and “Bobus” Noble together “took” that jump and this, “flew” that ditch, got “pounded,” Sir, by Jere, and “dead beat,” Sir; and “then,” continues Mr. Noble, branching off into an amusing incident of the field, “when I got up to the fence just by the hollow, who should I see but Biggs, the cotton-spinner, on that square chesnut of his, right at the fence. My beast was dead lame, so I pulled up short ; and there, Sir, would you believe it, Biggs, who gives any figure for a horse,” &c. There is a curious similarity in these legends of the hunting field : so not very much is lost by suppressing the embarrassment of Biggs.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

IN the drawing-room all the Penelopes wait their lords patiently. These noble seigneurs arrive presently, and graciously partake of coffee. Mr. Archdeacon—measuring the company round with a quick suspicious eye, as though he were uncertain whether he should

get them there and then into the Court of Arches—selects the elder of the Franklyn girls for his prey, and swoops down upon her, coffee-cup in hand. “Why is your sister away? when is she to be back? what keeps her?” said he, examining her himself before the Court. “She will be back the day after to-morrow. She is staying with the Cravens.” “I see—I see,” said Mr. Archdeacon. “At Sir Welbore’s. Very good—very good; quite proper. And now, Mr. Crowle there,—I’ve not seen him—I’ve not met him. How’s that now? Been here long?”

Mr. Franklyn here glides up quietly.

“We are talking of Crowle, your new man of business. A rather agreeable person—that is, *as a man of business.*”

“He is not to be judged by his years,” said Mr. Franklyn, “for he knows—let me see—he knows as much as—a man of double his age. So sharp—so wise—so brilliant!”

“A very singular person,” said Mr. Archdeacon, looking over to Mr. Crowle, who was now performing a legerdemain trick with no other property than a pocket-handkerchief. “Pity he didn’t take orders. These sort of versatile talents are what we want in the Church,” said Mr. Archdeacon, a little ruefully.

Mr. Crowle came over presently, having finished his trick, and was presented in due form to the admiring dignitary.

“If,” said Mr. Franklyn, “you should ever have need of a person to set your house in order—”

“That belongs to our profession,” said Mr. Archdeacon, with a smile.

"And lands," added Mr. Franklyn; "and in fact I may say, to help you generally out of confusion and embarrassment, let me advise you to think of Mr. Crowle. I have known him but for a short time unfortunately; but during that period he has been of enormous assistance to me—enormous! He has set an estate free from a load of encumbrance."

"But young Mr. Charles," said Mr. Crowle, gaily, "will do the rest. A good prize in the marriage lottery will be worth all my poor labours." All three, standing together at that moment with their coffee-cups in their hands, looked towards the quarter of the room where young Mr. Charles was. A few moments before they would have seen young Mr. Charles sitting on a sofa, beside the fresh girl who was dependent on the family, apparently busy looking through a little miniature gallery of photographic portraits, studying them with that deep earnestness, which shows that the mind had travelled far away. But now, when that tripod of human figures which stood together in the centre of the room, each busy with a coffee-cup and spoon, turned towards that sofa to look, it was empty. There was a green-house beyond, dimly lighted up, and two figures were seen indistinctly standing among the tiers of flower-pots.

"He will make the best of husbands," said Mr. Franklyn, with a gentle enthusiasm, "he is so affectionate, so good-natured. Now that relation of ours, Mr. Archdeacon, whom I was speaking to you of, she has need of every comfort and sympathy, poor child. And you cannot conceive his kind and respectful attention to her ever since he has been here."

"Very good," said Mr. Archdeacon, "quite proper."

"She naturally feels the delicacy of her position," said Mr. Franklyn; "and I must say for Charles, he has done everything to make her feel at ease."

"Quite so," said Mr. Archdeacon, coughing.

"He has a good heart has Mr. Charles," said Mr. Crowle. "Though I have had the honour of knowing Mr. Franklyn's family but for a short time, I said so from the beginning."

"He is always full of that nice careful thought, which is not to be expected in a boy of his years—for he is only a boy."

"Quite so," said Mr. Archdeacon. "And you think of marrying him soon. I think a very wise resolution."

"Why," said Mr. Franklyn, looking around timorously, "he has come home partly for his health, and partly for that. The first reason he knows; the second he does not suspect—as yet. He will do anything for us—for his family; and I have some one already marked. You see!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Crowle, wisely, "I see. Excellent! Capital! How clever!" There was nothing in the scheme worthy this panegyric, yet the praise made Mr. Franklyn look wise in his turn. And on that Mr. Crowle looked wiser again than he. Mr. Archdeacon looked neither wise nor foolish, but coughed again with much dubiousness. "Yes," said Mr. Franklyn, "there is a young lady, very beautiful—but that is no matter—and very well off; very splendidly off, I may say. Something is on foot in that direction. It would be premature to say more now. You understand?"

"Perfectly, perfectly," said Mr. Archdeacon.

"Ah! that is the true way to retrieve an estate," said Mr. Crowle, perfectly lost in admiration. "All our English estates are more or less dipped. In fact, it is the proper condition of a really healthy estate. A little retrenching here and there; a little looking into matters; and then sweep all clear at once with a good bold stroke. Marry your eldest son to an heiress, that is the mode in fashion now. Ah! Mr. Franklyn, you understand these things, I see."

But the grand topic that day, both at dinner and all through the evening, was a certain local bazaar, to be held within two days, for certain local charitable purposes. There were collieries near the Franklyns,—huge profitable collieries, that burrow away underground in all directions, and even under the Franklyn lands. Not, indeed, that the Franklyns were blessed enough to possess any of these English gold mines: they were unlucky enough to have parted with the Royalties, at a time when it was thought it would be a vain speculation. Directly they were parted with, a vein was lit upon and worked with gigantic profit. This was quite a type of the Franklyn "luck" through life. They always acquired blessings and parted with blessings at the wrong time. This bazaar, under the most distinguished patronage, was for the benefit of The Distressed Colliery Orphans, and all the Franklyn girls were to hold tables.

Presently comes in from the greenhouse, from among the leaves and flower-pots, that bright dependant of the Franklyn family floating in a cloud of muslin; her round face glowing as though lit up from within; her figure bringing colour in among the sombre neutral

tints scattered over the scene by Mr. Archdeacon and the rest of the company. The other girls were with her in a moment, and she was presently sitting between them with an arm round each of their waists; for she was very affectionate, this relation of Mr. Franklyn's, and demonstrated her regard in this way by a hundred little manifestations of this sort. She was charming to talk to in this sort of dear and confidential fashion, about things not by any means confidential; and these children—for they were next to children—delighted in this kind of private whispering, *corum publico*. They worried her now very gaily as to what she had done with Charles. Had she buried him in a flower-pot, or changed him into a scarlet-geranium?

"Jenny, dear," said one, "what do you and Charles make out to talk about? You know he is the stupidest creature on earth; and we are sick of mess and parade."

"And he hates ladies," said the other; "but he likes Jenny, I think."

"Likes me," said Jenny, with a half-melancholy burst: "not at all. You have no idea the sharp, cruel things he says to me. But I hope, dears, he will get over his prejudice; time works wonders, they say."

"I know," said the first, "what Jenny is thinking of; she is making poor Mr. Wells jealous. He doesn't know what he is doing to-night. Look! he has been staring at 'The Vernon Gallery' for the last half-hour, and never turned over a page," said Charlotte.

The other sister looked at him a little wistfully—she was thinking of his devotion at dinner, and her little conquest.

"Poor fellow!" she said, "he suffers."

"Let us plague him a little," said the younger sister. "He preaches too long; do make him more jealous, that's a dear Jenny, and to-morrow we shall have a grand making-up."

"Seriously," said the other, "how I am longing for it; you must just plague him a little more, and then give in—it will be charming. And papa says when that odious old Blowers "turns up his toes"—

"Hush, hush," said the other sister; "for shame, Charlotte."

All three men laughed secretly at the incumbent, who, utterly unconscious, stood not many yards away, expounding parochial matters to the Doctor.

"Papa says he will give Mr. Wells the Rectory. But, Jenny, for how long more shall you tease the wretch? Only fancy your being settled only a mile from the house."

"You are all too kind, too good to me," said Jenny Bell, with an earnest warmth; "you two darlings, you know, are the only things that would make me think of such a thing at all—for people in my place there is no choice; and yet, he is far above me, and you are all too kind to me—too kind."

Tears stood in the gentle Jenny Bell's eyes, as she thus hinted at her really desolate position; and the two sympathising sisters were presently cheering her with their traditional caresses.

The poor wounded curate at his table—who has been staring with strained eyes at the view in "The Vernon Gallery," with a steadiness with which that view was never contemplated before—steals a look across, and wonders what is this sorrow. Who knows—perhaps he

has unconsciously, and by some action unknown to himself, enraged—for he is a little rough and uncivilised in his ways and manners—that tender heart. He has been conscious, too, of what he interpreted as appealing looks, entreaties for mercy directed towards him from that sofa, where she sat the centre figure of the Three Graces. And so the injured curate, softening every moment, and becoming a small Magdalen in his penitence, is about rising up preparatory to casting himself at her feet, when he finds the room become of a sudden all disorganised, and every one making ready to depart; a clearly inopportune moment for any pathetics. There are a tribe of unlucky beings on this earth who are specially marked out for these crosses and contradictions, who, after prodigious argument and hesitation, select the most awkward hour of the whole twenty-four—and the most awkward minute of the awkward hour—for their plunge or purpose.

Mr. Archdeacon's one-horse carriage has now come round, and wishing "good-night" to all heartily, he trips away as though word had been brought to him that there were poachers in the preserves of the Church, and he was anxious to get his ecclesiastical gun down, and go out and find them. "Bobus" Noble reluctantly dismounts from that wonderful weight-carrier, for which he gave one eighty—" 'pon my soul, Sir, not a pound less"—and goes his way, drawn by an ordinary hack, of low price and mean power by comparison.

So with the Doctor—so with Reverend Doctor Blowers—so with the crushed curate, who, utterly wrecked and without the common decent aid of ordinary dissimulation, could not disguise his grief and his disappointment.

They were gone, and the drawing-rooms were left in that sort of waste and desert usually seen after guests have departed. Lights still burning and without purpose; furniture disordered; and a few survivors standing scattered here and there, looking to each other to have a sort of lonely air. Mr. Franklyn stands upon his own rug, the Selkirk of the place. Usually when his company went their way, a new train of disagreeable guests arrived in their room, and gloomy thoughts and anxieties only temporarily dislodged (just as people of the house give up their rooms to strangers) came hurrying back promptly. But to-night he was thinking of the orange blossoms and the grand heiress he had in his eye. And he saw Mr. Crowle, the new man of business, skilfully co-operating—clearing one field after another of the estate; and the heiress doing the rest all in one *coup*. Full of which agreeable thoughts, he took his candle, and leaving the three twined together still as the Three Graces, passed down, as he always did of a night, to his study. For he generally took a short spell with spade or hoc among his papers and figures before going to bed. As he stood, candle in hand, wishing them all good-night, he said to Jenny Bell, encouragingly—

“What is the matter to-night, Jane? I have hardly heard your voice. Not low-spirited, eh? Never mind; all will go straight yet.”

He looked meaningly at them all round, alluding, no doubt, to that lovers' little difficulty, as he took it to be, then passed away quickly to the sacred study, and was presently shovelling up the marl of docketts and figures down below.

Then they all went up to bed; that is, carried out the

pleasant young ladies' fiction of going to bed : which in this instance signifies going up to dear Jenny's little room, to talk over the whole night again. It was plain that this duty could have been gone through with more convenience by that famous drawing-room fire, still blazing merrily ; yet it was held to be altogether a different thing. There was a cosiness and comfort about the dressing-table which set the whole course of events in an utterly different light, and lit them up so to speak with fresh colours. And so the young ladies being gathered here again, released the zones of the girdles in concert, and enacted the whole of that night scene over again.

One of them would rally Jenny pleasantly upon the love-sick curate, the other joining her, yet not with the same enthusiasm, for a reason we know.

"It will be delightful," said the one ; "we will get papa to build you a house, and he will easily get the bishop to make up a new living for him near the house." (The girl's notions of the extent of episcopal power were, it will be seen, a little loose and erroneous.)

"Yes," said her sister, "you must leave us, Jenny. We must see you every day ; we will go and take tea with you."

Jenny humbly deprecated this brilliant prospect. "My dear children," she said, "you think of poor Jenny's powers of fascination too highly. I am a very plain ordinary creature, that must try and please everybody. But, darlings, you are mistaken about poor Mr. Wells. At most, it *may* be a foolish passing fancy ; but to dream of me as a partner to a good clergyman, in his holy

round of offices, darlings, it is a terrible responsibility to think of."

"What nonsense, Jenny!" laughed the girls; "everybody marries a parson without thinking twice about it."

"Indeed," said the other, "there is one thing, the odious white tie,—'choker,' Charles calls it."

"It is the sacred symbol," answered Jenny, "which marks him out from other men. But it is only a dream," said Jenny, gaily. "I have a life of work before me: you, dears, may think of such things."

Then they came to talk of the bazaar—the coming bazaar—the absorbing topic: how they would dress: how much they would sell; how their stall would look; and how kind it was of Lady Lambkin to help them. That noble person was indeed going to assist them; and was kind enough to allow the stall to be labelled Lady Lambkin's stall, and kinder still not to contribute a single article, but to hold herself out to the public as the registered proprietress of the shop. These acts of kindness are happily not rare.

Then the hair came down in tresses, and they talked of many other things, and finally went to bed.

CHAPTER V.

THE ASHTON COUNTY BAZAAR.

ASHTON was the county town of the county in which the Franklyns lived, and Ashton was the place where the scene of the great bazaar was to be laid.

All religious denominations. Everything sectarian rigidly excluded. Under distinguished patronage. Analysed, the distinguished patronage comprised the following elements :—

Patronesses.

- The Lady Mantower.
- The Lady Ringtail.
- The Lady Moleskin.
- The Lady Margaret Tilbury.
- The Hon. Mrs. De Bloom.
- Mrs. Maindrum.
- Mrs. Peekes.
- Mrs. Welbore Craven.
- Mrs. Roan Philips.
- Mrs. Tidyman.
- The Misses Franklyn.
- &c. &c. &c.

Most of these ladies had kindly signified their intention of holding stalls, and for the last two months the air of the county had rung with the din of preparation, and

the faint tinkling of the various instruments in the great armoury of crochet and knitting-needles.

It is not too much to say that close upon one hundred sofa cushions of graduated sizes were known to be in progress; on which were displayed every variety of human pattern: diaper, lozenges, crossbars—also specimens of the great animal family, the dog (lap and other kinds), the dog's head, with a letter in the mouth, the dog couchant, and the dog rampant. What was known as "the banner screen" was largely run upon, and innumerable specimens of that form of ornament were known to be well forward; and the "banner screen,"—in most instances, meant to be a proud shape of decoration when mounted in a costly manner,—usually resulted in an article of a spare and spindle look, generally shrinking away into poor, not to say mean proportions, as though there had been some mistake in the cutting out. Every proprietress of a "banner screen" invariably determined to *exploiter* her work by the agency of the lottery-ticket, half a crown each.

But it would not be fair to pass over without notice the very meritorious labours of one special family, Mrs. Ryder and her daughters. After all, given the unlimited command of costly materials, it is easy to produce a dazzling effect. This is an unfair competition. The skilled workwoman is at a disadvantage. And yet not in the least disheartened, Mrs. Ryder and the Misses Ryder carried on their labours, and by the mere agency of such simple materials as card, Bristol board, a little gold paper, a little coloured paper, some glass, and I believe a small mixture of bran (used, however, with judgment), and gum, which is the basis of all,

produced the most marvellous results. A little fur from a decayed boa, and a glass bead, were surely poor materials to work with; and yet with this frayed scrap of fur and the beads, and it must be added a little gum, the basis of all things, Mrs. Ryder in person produced a wonderful likeness of a little dog, on a little scarlet cloth rug, perfect in ears, tail, nose, and everything a dog should have. The fame of Mrs. Ryder for these little creatures was naturally spread far and wide, and it was known that for the coming show, bazaar that is, all hands were at work night and day to furnish a supply of the mimic animals adequate to the anticipated demand. Nor was it in dogs merely that the art of these skilful ladies was conspicuous. With versatile talents they were owned to be unapproached in the manufacture of little card-boxes, watch-stands and cases (wonderful to say of the same simple material, gum of course being the basis); dressing-boxes; anything, in short, to which that universal material could be made to lend itself. The Ryder family confined itself exclusively to this branch of the profession. Everybody laboured industriously in the good cause.

It was a fine day. It was a festival for the county and a gala for the little town of Ashton. The great room in the Market-house had been kindly lent by the authorities, and had been decorated "with much taste and elegance," said the local paper, "by Mr. J. Ramsbottom, the eminent upholsterer of our town." It must be said that Mr. J. Ramsbottom's exertions were bounded by a sort of general distribution of blue and pink calico, wherever that material could be conveniently introduced.

still the effect was gay and striking. In an adjoining chamber was the band of the Ashton Rifles, who, by the "kind permission" of Colonel Dutton, were allowed to perform "some of the beautiful airs"—I quote again from the local paper—"for which this corps is so justly esteemed."

The Franklyn family went in their carriages. All the county families went in their carriages. The dresses were of the gayest. No distinction of creed or politics. Mr. Hounhym, Lady Moleskin's son, was there, and Lady Moleskin herself held a stall. So, too, did Lady Margaret Tilbury. And yet it was well known that the relations of these two families had been much embittered by a recent election struggle in which Mr. Hounhym and Mr. Tilbury had lately been engaged. Mr. Hounhym was even seen, amid breathless admiration, to purchase a smoking cap from Lady Margaret Tilbury, and went through the ceremony with smiles, and much good humour.

It was a very gay sight. The wares were crowded together, and the sellers of the wares performed their function with "engaging grace and propriety" (words taken from the local journals). The matrons stood behind as presiding shopwomen; notorious by very new bonnets secured with a gala tightness under the chin. They were to be recognised as appointed lady-shopwomen even outside the marks and tokens about them, by the flushes and heats of office. They were supported, each matron by a fascinating daughter—inexperienced, blushing, unused to trade—falling into unshopwoman-like mistakes every moment. They engaged Captain Tidyman and Major Hoskyns at short range, and

seduced those officers into heavy purchases. But the matrons never lost what might be called their business eye, and took a strictly cash view of the whole.

The Franklyns' stall was kindly presided over by Lady Lambkin, there being no matron in the Franklyn family. Round her clustered the girls. Charlotte, the eldest, should have been there, but Miss Jenny Bell took her place; not by any means intrusively, but keeping studiously in the background, a course to which she was indeed almost driven by the strange behaviour of Lady Lambkin, who kept sniffing at her from her throne in a disdainful fashion. If she were snorting fire from her nostrils, she could not have more effectually scorched away Jenny. The Franklyn girls—gay, natural, joyous things—went to their work with spirit, and really did a surprising amount of business. They did not scruple to accost strange persons passing by, and with importunity forced sales; yet never overstepped the line of a modest persecution. But there were other hoydens loose in the room confined by no stall or counter, who had broken from their halter and scoured the plain. They had their hands full of tickets—tickets invariably for “a banner screen”—and presented their cards at the head of the passer-by like a pistol. Other wayward coquettish skirmishers had built for themselves a delightful little post-office, with a letter-box and an inquiry window; with a guerilla skirmisher of adroit and insinuating address in front. She played the part of “bringer” in military language, and led up the captive postulant to the window, where a voice proceeding from a new and elegant London bonnet wished to know the name of the

person expecting a letter; and where, after a short delay, a letter was found, actively directed as desired, which on payment of only one shilling was handed out, to the amazed inquirer.

It was altogether a very pleasant scene. The unholy rattle of the dice was heard even above the imperfect musical accomplishments of the Ashton Rifles; and gaiety was enhanced by the spectacle of tall men carrying helplessly about with them unwieldy cushions, which they pressed tightly to their bosoms like infants, because they knew not how to carry them in any other fashion.

And yet Miss Jenny Bell, while shrinking out of the direction of Lady Lambkin's hot and disdainful blast, could not bring herself to overlook the meritorious ends of the charity. In her modest retiring way she tried to engage buyers. She was not very skilful at her needle, but had contrived to put together a sort of nondescript bag of simple shape and pattern: which was a bag for no special purpose, but which Jenny fancied in her helpless way was "a tobacco pouch." She clung to this article tenderly, and put it forward with every advantage: but somehow it did not seem to attract. Elderly gentlemen passed it by almost with contempt—passing by, too, Jenny's shrinking introduction of it to their notice, which in itself was worth money.

The curate, the Reverend Mr. Wells, had known of this precious work long before; in fact, through all its stages of production. He had offered almost a year's stipend for it—implored that it might be his. But Jenny was good-naturedly obdurate, protesting that she would not let her friends waste their money on such a humble, homely thing; he must buy some of these other pretty

things. "Come, now," she would add with mystery, "he should have these charming slippers for a guinea. No?" and the pretty shopwoman sighed.

Major Carter and Captain Manger, quartered in the town, had lounged in, and were soon at Lady Lambkin's inquiring the latest market quotations with a great deal of interest. That noble lady heaped her wares upon them profusely—a purse, a cigar-case, a large cushion, a bag and a handkerchief—but failed to suit them. They lounged away gradually towards the left, and began to enter into treaty with the more piquant shopwomen.

These gentry are never profitable customers; for it is part of their faith that some gracious notice, and possibly a crude compliment or two, is excellent coinage and fair payment for all goods. Jenny said to her neighbours, "Now, dears, we must make these creatures buy;" and with this end proposed to lavish all her attentions on an elderly lady who was then cheapeening a sixpenny doll. The military gentlemen asked the price of this and that, and everything, which she reluctantly—reluctant at being interrupted—told them, and returned to her elderly lady. This abstinence has a curious effect always. "Was there nothing they could raffle? Come! This lady's work-bag, for instance?" taking up Jenny's own work. "That was a tobacco pouch," said Jenny; and had cleverly in her own mind organised a raffle on the spot. "Tickets two shillings and sixpence each, please."

She had those two soldiers throwing dice for at least a quarter of an hour for her tobacco pouch; throwing in a half-provoked, half-amused fashion, and bringing out wretchedly low figures. Jenny seduced them on and on like a Circe. "Oh, how near!" she said in deep

grief, as one gentleman threw twenty-one. "Oh, *do* try again; you *must* try again." But when they finally desisted, she became cold and indifferent, and eventually wholly absorbed in a gentleman who was turning over a cigar-case. This is the morality of bazaars.

But young Mr. Franklyn from India had not as yet come to the table. The curate had hovered about it in agonies, while the officers were making their advances; and was much relieved by the way in which they were dismissed. He kept coming back and coming back, but still was useful; for he was sent away to dispose of tickets, and charged not to come back without money; which last he sometimes, to purchase smiles of approbation, supplemented out of his own means. But young Mr. Franklyn had not come up as yet. This was the reason.

Mr. Franklyn, senior, had gone in himself to the festival. He never indulged in treats of this sort; but this was pure business. That Mr. Marley, who possessed a large estate not very far away, but whose father had been in a manufacturing walk of life, where he had picked up funds to purchase the estate—that Mr. Marley should have been at the bazaar was a matter of no very great concern to any one. But he had brought his only daughter, Miss Marley, which did greatly concern Mr. Franklyn. This was the young lady about whom he had consulted Mr. Archdeacon.

To this young person was young Franklyn led. She was tall and pleasant to look on; she was gracious too, and her natural guardian was encouraging. Young Franklyn was charged to lead her about to various stalls, which he did chafing and reluctant—a foolish, stupid

child of a soldier, who did not know what was good for him. Mr. Franklyn talked to Mr. Marley, but watched the pair from afar with a wistful eye. No wonder; for as they receded, he saw fading out of sight his long train of mortgages, bonds and charges, which this happy alliance would remove for ever.

Soon, however, on some pretext, young Mr. Franklyn shook himself free; he had presently, with true fraternal instinct, glided over to his sisters' table. The curate felt his presence by an utter blankness at his heart. Jenny was suffering from the heat, from fatigue, from her labours, and more than all from Lady Lambkin's fiery blasts; whose formal pride had been wounded by the felonious abstraction of many valuable customers. The girls felt for their friend. Would Charles take her away and get her some refreshment? The curate writhed.

They went. Charming Mrs. Welbore Craven, a youngish married lady with an oldish husband, stood behind a stall selling cakes and ices, like a real confectioner! It was exquisite, the grace with which she went through her functions—gave and received change—and asked the special character of ice wanted, in the true confectioner's key. Her dress, exquisitely in character, heightened the effect, and excited universal admiration. Gentlemen clustered round and gave large orders. Ices, two shillings and sixpence each—but then, consider, in the sweet cause of charity; and a large sum handed in to the committee from the sale of ices, would be an advertised testimonial to the power of Mrs. Welbore Craven's charms. It is well known that old General Bulstock, who has to visit Vichy and other waters every year—for a generally disorganised interior—was well-nigh reduced

to death's door from eating three of these delicacies in succession; and thus, purchased three of Mrs. Crayen's smiles and three pretty speeches.

Young Mr. Franklyn took Jenny up to this lady's stall, and gave her an ice. He then walked round the rooms to give her air and general relief. They saw the little sucking-pig tied up with pink ribbon, which Miss Boleshiver was raffing; they saw the post-office in brisk work, and inquired for letters directed to Charles Franklyn, Esquire, and received one. Then they talked of the sales, and curious to say, with an absence of mercantile morality to be paralleled only at scenes of this kind, the little tobacco pouch became the property of Charles Franklyn, Esquire, under earnest protest from Miss Bell, who indeed gave no consent; thinking of a sort of implied contract with various "rafflers," civil and military, with whom a sort of faith should be kept. But young Mr. Franklyn had it all his own way.

Then they went into the next room to sit down; few came that way, so they excited no attention. But the curate of the anxious wistful face, who had missed them at once, soon began to seek after them with a raging jealousy, and peeped in with a secret conspirator-like fashion. He saw them talking very earnestly. I suppose there was at least an hour consumed in the operation of getting that ice.

Presently they came forth, the youth with a flushed cheek and a sort of triumph in his eye. The curate marked them nervously. Then came up Mr. Franklyn, senior. He had been looking for his son everywhere, having missed him, and found him absent from the rich

Miss Marley. The youth went back at once, eagerly. He was in high spirits, and exaggerated in his devotions to Miss Marley. That young lady was pleased and very gracious. Her father looked on with a kindly eye, for he respected the old blood and good lineage of the Franklyns. Mr. Franklyn looked on too, from afar, and was glad in his secret soul.

It was altogether a most successful gala day, to be long after talked of by country firesides. The Franklyns drove home all in spirits, most of all Mr. Franklyn; for he had engaged to dinner, for next Thursday, Mr. Marley and his daughter, Miss Marley, who had both accepted with *empressement*. He scarcely spoke going home; and was even complimenting himself upon his own sagacity and skill in conducting his business thus far, so successfully.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. FRANKLYN'S VISITORS.

At dinner it was a perfect Babel. Everyone told their adventures; everyone spoke together. There were a hundred droll little scenes rising out of buying and selling experiences. How old Lady Mantower had waited to the very end, and then had gone round, shabbily buying up really good articles at a frightful depreciation. How that stingy "Bobus" Noble, with all his free speech and his promises yesterday, could with difficulty be persuaded to part with one shilling, which was wrung from him with inconceivable pains and difficulty. How one old

gentleman had set his eye on a special cushion, for which he had thrown a high number, and kept jealous watch and ward over it the whole day, coming back every five minutes, and demanding to know the state of the dice poll—as though he suspected foul play, which indeed he might have done reasonably; for such *was* intended—one of the girls wishing that a certain young Alfred Carter who generously spent his little all among them, taking ticket after ticket—might, by some pardonable *hocus-pocus*, have the prize shuffled over to him. But what could be done? He perversely threw the most ridiculously low numbers. This wretched old gentleman watched them narrowly.

Jenny Bell had in truth the greatest triumphs of all to record, and yet she was pensive and silent. They thought she was tired, or perhaps that she was annoyed by the noble Lady Lambkin's behaviour. Young Charles Franklyn was not so lively, or even boisterous as customary; but that did not seem remarkable. At the close of a long day, gentlemen are sometimes silent, or even moody, without ostensible cause, and there is always indulgence.

It was a perfect series of comic sketches, and they were very merry over them the whole evening. But the most fascinating part of the whole, was the counting over the gains of the day. A little money-box, bursting with shillings and sixpences and sovereigns, was emptied out on the table; and being laboriously counted, was found to amount to the grand total of twenty-five pounds six shillings and sixpence. It was marvellous, and yet, strange to say, a little margin had to be allowed for bad money: even in this

sacred cause the corruption of human nature was found to enter.

So the evening passed away. Mr. Franklyn went down to his study as usual, but a good deal later than usual.

While he is thus busy, there is a light tripping step in the gallery, and some one taps very gently. He is down with his head bent into a low drawer, and does not hear. So the door is softly opened, and that round figure of Jenny, bright as ever, stands nervously on the threshold, with a timorous—

“Might I speak to you, Sir?”

The loud crash of the drawer closed violently, and the Franklyn face, lifted hastily, and seeming a little pale and nervous, is the answer. He stands up, entrenched behind his desk and papers.

“Well,” he said, “what is it? What do you want? I am rather busy now.”

“Oh! nothing, nothing, Sir. I beg your pardon—indeed I do. I do not intend it, I assure you.”

And our poor frightened Jenny, utterly scared, does indeed seem ready to sink into the earth. Naturally the slightest rebuff was to her the stroke of a flail.

“No, don’t go away,” said Mr. Franklyn. “Come in, Jenny, and tell me what I can do for you. There, sit down,” he added, kindly. “Now——”

Still shrinking, she says—

“Oh, Sir, I intrude upon you; I have disturbed you. It was only to tell you, Sir——”

“Now sit down,” said Mr. Franklyn, taking her hand in his, “and let me hear this important communication. You wanted to tell me——”

"Sir—dear Sir—you won't be angry, but I must go away."

"Do you mean, leave our house?" said he, in astonishment.

"I must go home," she said. "You have been so good, so kind to me—but I *must* go; it is better that I should—far better."

"Why, I can't comprehend," said Mr. Franklyn, looking at her, a little bewildered. "You seemed so happy to-night, and to like us ~~all~~ so."

"I know I seem ungrateful—ungracious," she continued, not bursting into tears, but agitated, "but you, dear—*dearest* Sir—will understand me, when I say it is better that I should go. You know how happy I have been. Oh! too happy."

All doubt and gravity passed away from the head of the Franklyn family in an instant.

"Oh—oh!—I see—I see," he said; "I am getting old and stupid; and perhaps thinking too much of my own business. I should have known—of course I should. Cheer up, my little girl,—don't be thinking of such desperate measures. We shall set it all straight in the morning."

And the head of the Franklyn family looked at her with knowingness and encouragement, showing that he understood the whole embarrassment. He had seen and remarked the curate's wan and dejected face. It had crossed him many times during the day, looking out wistfully for something. It was too plain. A lovers' quarrel. Poor Jenny, poor child!

* But our Jenny could not comprehend him. She was so simple, so full of childish gaiety, that she would accept

a statement with the plainest sincerity, but meanings that were undercurrents she could not reach to. So her round eyes opened and her round cheek glowed again.

"I owe it to your goodness, dear Sir, to leave. I shall find a home somewhere. But let me not take with me the thought that I have in any way taken advantage of your goodness. It was not my fault—indeed it was not."

And Jenny sought the hand of her protector, and gently pressing it in her own, devoutly raised it to her lips; with the light of Mr. Franklyn's lamp quite close and playing on her face, it looked a perfect bit of Etty handling.

Mr. Franklyn cheered her as best he could. He still thought of the clergyman.

"My little girl," he said, "we will talk it over to-morrow, when I shall settle everything to please you. There is one thing you must put out of your head. We won't let you go. There, good-night."

She was gone some ten minutes, and Mr. Franklyn was again deep in his mystic drawer, when another tap is heard at the door, and the drawer is again closed smartly. His son Charles, the youthful warrior, entered. He was agitated, and closed the door with some solemnity. Mr. Franklyn was a mild patient man, and not likely to protest against such interruptions.

"Well, Charles," he said, kindly.

"My dear father," said the youth, hurriedly, "I must speak to you."

Another parent would have testily sworn the whole world wanted to speak to him that night, but Mr. Franklyn was very gentle.

"Ah, I know," said he, drily. "Well, I am very glad you have come down. I want to hear about it all—from beginning to end. Give me your hand. I was delighted with you to-day."

The youth was confused, and gave his hand in a dull, guilty way.

"She's a fine girl, Charles," said Mr. Franklyn, "and one we should like if she hadn't a penny. But shall I tell you what her father said to me? Now, I think, coming from him it was very encouraging. He said——"

"Oh, Sir," said Charles, interrupting, "it is not that. It was not about this—I wasn't thinking of it; but about——"

"Well, all in good time," said Mr. Franklyn, poking the fire. "Draw your chair in, Charles. Money, I suppose? Don't be afraid. I don't mind *now*. How much? Come, don't be afraid."

"No! no! no!" said the young man eagerly. "Nothing of the kind. You have always, Sir, been so — so — affectionate to me, gratifying all my desires, that——"

"Well, Charles, what do you wish for?"

"Yes, Sir. And I think you would not make me miserable—unhappy—wretched for life——"

"Good gracious, no, Charles! Why——"

"You would not see me ill—sick—dying, perhaps; for you know, Sir, I am not strong, and——"

"Good Heavens! Charles, speak out. What *do* you want?"

"Sir, Sir, forgive me. I don't know how to tell it to you—but—but——"

A strange paleness suddenly came upon Mr. Franklyn's

face, and he looked down mechanically at the drawer, where he had been digging.

"I don't understand you. Speak out," he said, thickly.

"Oh, Sir," said the youth, covering his face, "I LOVE JENNY BELL, and am utterly miserable, and I shall die if you do not let me marry her !"

CHAPTER VII.

JENNY BELL OUTCAST.

THE next day gloom overcast the Franklyn mansion; a grim ogre had stepped in, and was walking about. It was as though a funeral were about to be, and the body were lying up stairs.

Such a blow had never fallen upon a simple family. It reacted on the whole house.

Mr. Franklyn was as though he had been seized on by a stroke. He sat stupified, in solitude—barricaded in his study. A weak, timid man, with no trenchant argumentative powers of storm and attack, he had no influence for terror or otherwise, in his family. It had fallen on him like a bolt, for none knew so well as he what tremendous interests depended upon a sort of commercial marriage being brought about in his family. So that at first taking his son in with much nervousness and trepidation—for he always dreaded scenes—he spoke to him as though the thing were a mere theory, utterly puerile, and not to be thought of for an instant.

To him, the son, in a sort of heroic rant and declama-

tion; that he must die; that his health was poor; that he would never get over it; and that, to live at all, he must marry this surpassing Jenny. The father then tries duty, affection, and the simple, autocratic "*moi je le veux*." It couldn't be,—it was not to be thought of,—but with equal success. Then, as is usual with weak minds, flies off into a poor, frothy passion,—threatens,—tries a poor make-believe of wrong, without any bottom to support it,—sets the other on his mettle,—who becomes defiant, heroic, positive, and independent;—will go forth upon the world. Let the Franklyn estate be sold; let them dispose of it as they will, without reference to him. There is his commission still left; let that be sold too. He will face the world, he and his Jenny. He will work for their common subsistence; with more of the like extravagance.

As for the condition of our Jenny, it is truly piteous. Everyone must do her this justice, that she could not have foreseen this complication; or, that when she did see, she nobly went to the head of the house, and would have denounced the mischief. The tears, the floods of tears she shed that day! The way she outpoured her sorrows, first into this, and then into that, sympathising heart. She wept, and was wept with, upon the stairs, in the passages, in the boudoirs, dining-rooms, gardens. The whole female world condoled with her. But to go away she was determined.

Up stairs in her little room the packing went forward diligently. The small black trunk, which took all her little movables,—there was not much heavy portage in those worldly effects, a simple wardrobe, in good taste and sufficient,—was the whole. A dreary, ceremonial

that "packing," at which assisted mournfully all disengaged females of the house.

The head of the family did not indeed regard her savagely, but looked on her with suspicion and distrust. It was enough that she should have that destiny of domestic expatriation before her ; but most cruel of all—as she must have felt it—was that coldness and injurious suspicion from one she loved and respected. The whole house joined in this view. The gay laugh, the joyous spirit, in which they delighted, was not heard. The bright eyes,—the lamps of the house,—were a little dim.

Dinner was an awful ceremonial,—long remembered. The soldier, who was in mutiny, kept away. Jenny sat there, a dull statue, but did not eat. Before the end she flew away precipitately, having previously answered some questions a little hysterically. Reproachful glances were all focussed directly upon the head of the family, who grew red, and hot, and uncomfortable. For surely, of all the harmless, cheerful, engaging things to have in a house,—a kind of social light to the eyes, and a gentle stove for the heart, one who furnished the merriest music in the orchestra all the year round,—was this Jenny Bell. That was the popular sentiment. The girls, to be sure, were little more than advanced school-girls, the age wherein an extravagant "heroine worship" is developed ; and that youth in his military suit about as much a man as little Tommy, who is girt about with a cheap tin sword, a sham cartouche pouch, and a light wooden gun. But this is the stuff of which admiring multitudes are made. It did not make much matter, for our poor Jenny was resolved to go out upon the world with to-morrow's dawn, early, before anyone was up

(this carefully stipulated), unbreakfasted, unanointed, unannealed. Was not the little trunk lying up stairs ready corded ?

The gaiety of Mr. Crowle,—who was of the party,—was likewise damped. That exuberant man of business was, as it were, turned in upon himself. • He looked with interest over at the poor victim,—this self-devotion and social Sutteeship, and seemed to compassionate. Coming from him, who had looked forward to rich nuptials as the best pumps and engines for clearing the flooded district, and who had been diligently employed in getting things ready for setting up such useful machinery,—it was more than could be expected.

So the gay man of business,—whose gaiety had been so much damped by this mournful state of affairs,—came over to Jenny that evening, in the drawing-room, before dinner, where all were sitting like a company of ghouls, and talking in whispers, and sat, down opposite to her, with whom two female friends were sympathising.

“This is sad news,” he said, “Miss Bell ; weary news. Still fixed on going to-morrow ? ”

“Yes,” she said ; “alas ! I must.”

“And yet,” said Mr. Crowle, “*I* don’t see the necessity ; of course, *that* is no reason why there should not *be* a necessity, or why you should stay, or why you should go ; but, still, it seems to me very curious.”

Miss Bell made no answer ; but it was plain that this merely touching on the subject was distressing to her, for her fingers were busy with her pocket handkerchief.

“I think it a pity,” continued Mr. Crowle, in a ruminative way, “you are so liked in this house. But, of

course, *that* is no reason ; I mean whether *I* think it a pity or no."

MISS BELL answered devoutly, "Ah, you do not know me! I cannot tell you *how* I feel, and what it will cost me to part. Oh! to-morrow! to-morrow!"

And Miss Bell, scared at the prospect of that terrible morn, covered up her face. The girls who supported her gave soothing comfort and consolation. "Dear Jenny!"

"Darling Jenny!" were heard amid their caresses.

Mr. Crowle was much interested.

"And yet, it is very hard that this penalty should fall on you,—you personally,—who are as innocent in the matter—if I *may* be pardoned the expression—as the child unborn."

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Crowle," say the two girls in chorus.

"*You* never thought, dreamed, that Mr. Charles had such a thing in his head; *you* never gave this perverse young gentleman what is called encouragement. No wonder it burst upon you like a thunderbolt."

Miss Bell let her handkerchief drop from her face, looked at Mr. Crowle, and then said, "Ah, you at least understand me."

"I can conceive the surprise of such a thing," he went on, "your wonder, your stupified wonder at the discovery. Your thoughts, perhaps, all the while in another direction,—forgive me the remark,—in possibly a sacred direction."

"Mr. Crowle!"

"I only wished to illustrate my meaning. Let me say, in *any* direction. I only wish to convey my notion of the surprise and astonishment which must have fallen on

you. It is certainly hard for one so perfectly innocent to have to suffer."

This gentleman's thus harping upon an unpleasant subject, naturally troubled our Jenny a little. She fixed her round, imploring eyes upon him for a moment, then rose and went over to one of the girls. Dinner then came, and Mr. Crowle, the gay young man of business, went down last of all, rubbing his hands.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOMESTIC BATTLE.

A GLOOMY evening. Mr. Franklyn with the mark of a sort of domestic Cain upon his brow, and clearly uncomfortable, retired promptly to his fastness in the parlour, and entrenched himself there. Mr. Crowle went now and again into the library, read a newspaper or book, and came back again shortly, drawn, as he said, by an irresistible fascination. For Jenny Bell, instead of "giving way," as many a girl of her age would have done under the dispiriting influences of the occasion, struggled,—not manfully, which is sometimes but a poor shape of struggle, but *womanfully*,—to keep up the spirits of her friends. She even affected a sort of gaiety, a sham imitation of her own natural gaiety; she went to the piano, and sang some of her favourite songs, which had been wont to plunge the curate into a delirium of mournful admiration; for "it was the last night," as she said many times over, "and she *must* go in the morning." The little modest trunk already packed, &c.;—and now

that she thought of it, it would not be perhaps, *too* much to have the—carriage—might she? Surely it would not be too early. The evening after, at four o'clock, she would be at home—as she must now call it—with a benevolent aunt, who would harbour her a few weeks, until it would be seen what results advertising in the *Times* would bring. A very brave and resigned little Jenny—so at least she seemed to those in that room; and presently the clouds began to gather, and the rain to drop in heavy showers of grief. So these obsequies went on on that dismal night that Jenny Bell was talking of going away.

About ten o'clock a step was heard on the stairs, tramping down hurriedly, and one of the Franklyn girls said nervously that it was Charles. The trepidation of the circle increased prodigiously when the door of the fastness below was heard to open and then close again, with a stern and defiant bang. There was a solemn interview, then, going on between father and son. What a moment of trial for our Jenny Bell! And yet, was not the result for her utterly indifferent? for it is known that it was her firm purpose, no matter what reconciliation was arrived at, to quit the mansion. Such a course was only due to her sense of self-respect.

It was a long and painful struggle. She had announced it to the girls, who were first aghast, then indignant. The next question was, where she was to go to, or *could* go to? That was not of so much concern, she had a little money put by; the world was happily sufficiently wide. At all events, in *that* house at least was not her place, bearing discord and miserable estrangement between dear members of the same family.

The way in which our Jenny spoke of these matters was truly piteous, and the light she set them in very forcible. So, as may well be conceived, she took all hearts with her.

More than half an hour was spent in that unseen struggle below. Finally, the door was heard to be flung open, and Mr. Franklyn came tramping in, very heated and very wild, and trembling all over, followed, too, by his son, with flaming cheeks, and a general flavour of stern heroics over him.

"I take you all to witness," said Mr. Franklyn, in a loud quavering voice, "what this foolish headstrong boy is bent upon. Let him take his own course, and carry out this precious bit of insanity. Let him marry a beggar if he like, and make himself—me—you all—beggars, too!"

In justice to this excited man, it must be said that he did not see Jenny Bell at that moment—she was sitting rather in the shadow, and he took her for one of his own daughters.

So gentle was she that she made not the slightest protest at this cruel epithet, but was presently struggling with hysterical sobs. For these are a sort of emotion it is impossible to disguise.

Wounded and reproachful glances were bent upon him from many quarters. Even he was touched, and began in a sort of fashion to excuse himself.

"You know yourself," he said eagerly, "we are not rich. You know this,—you came to me yourself to tell me as much. It is a miserable thing, and will be our ruin. Of course beggar is—is—scarcely the proper word; and—and—I did not see you here; but I can't

help speaking out properly, when I hear of such utter folly and insanity——”

“Beggars, then, let it be,” said the youth, still flaming in his heroics; “she has no need to be ashamed of it. How, Sir, could you be so cruel? But to me it is a prouder title than if she were Queen or Countess, and I should have more joy in linking my fortune to hers, in this—indigence, than if she had millions.”

The youth's voice trembled as he sent forth this splendid sentiment. The female bystanders, though filled with terror at the tragic significance of the drama, were overflowing with secret admiration, and even awe, at this magnificent chivalry.

And yet, Mr. Franklyn was not a sort of paternal Jove Tonans, thundering forth maledictions with fury and menaces. He was more agitated than angry, and was really a prey to fright and confusion of mind.

Jenny Bell came forth from her shadow, and with trembling limbs advanced into the middle of the room, possibly making for the door. She fixed her large full eyes upon the enraged lord of the castle—they were swimming in tears—

“Indeed, Sir,” she said, “I, and I alone, am to blame for this. Unfortunate, wretched creature that I am, to bring such trouble into the house of my best friend and benefactor.”

“No, no,” said he, “I don't blame you—that is, I do you injustice,—you could not help it—certainly you could not.”

“Why did I ever enter this house?” broke out Jenny, now in a torrent of tears. “Why was I not left in the obscure station that fitted me, and go down at once into

the rank that best suits one of *my* reduced means? But to be guilty, to *appear* to be guilty of such ingratitude to the friend that raised me up, the benefactor that cherished me——” And here Jenny could not go on further, getting almost hysterical with her emotions.

She was standing in the middle of the room, tottering almost — that poor friendless orphan. Some one humanely rushes with a chair, barely in time. The girls group round her. The youth stands over her with an air of protection. Mr. Franklyn, naturally a just and humane man, feels strangely uncomfortable. The hands of all present, children of his as they are, are against him. He goes up to her, and takes her hand :

“Jenny,” he says, “I acquit you ; indeed I do. Do not set me down as so harsh. These things sometimes cannot be helped—there is a fate in them. But I say, indeed, I do acquit you of all share in this.”

Jenny had glided down upon her knees, and had now his hand in hers, pressing it to her lips. “Thanks, thanks,” she said, in a low voice, “what goodness, how gracious ! Now, *now* I can go away ; you have taken a load from my heart.”

“No, no,” said Mr. Franklyn, raising her up, there is no need of that. Let us look at the thing rationally. Charles here knows—*knows*—he *must* see it cannot be—it is out of the question. He might as well send me to a prison.”

The youth smiled.

“You were talking to me, Sir, only a week ago of our flourishing condition, of cheque-books and balances. I was given to understand the estate was getting cleared,” he added, scornfully.

"I said it would be cleared," said Mr. Franklyn, warmly, "subject to your marriage. Besides, I am not to be brought to account for every careless word. I tell you again, you can't afford to marry in this sort of way. Oh ! Charles, listen to your poor father ! I did not mean to speak harshly to you, indeed I did not. But we must have money. We stand in a frightful way. Miss Marley's fortune——"

"I don't want wealth," said the youth, "nor estates. All I care for is the girl I love, and——"

Mr. Franklyn, for about the second or third time in his life, tried a sneer. "And a cottage," he added.

"Yes, Sir," said the youth. (All the parties, during this distressing interview, were on the verge of explosion at any instant). "Yes, Sir," broke out the youth, "in a cottage. I am not ashamed of such a wish. It is no discredit to me. I have never, thank God, been a blind worshipper of money. That is not my creed, I assure you. I shall——"

"Hush, hush !" said Jenny, supplicating, for the voices were getting loud ; "do not, I beseech you. Let me go, let me leave at once ; I never thought of this."

"Courage, Jenny," said the youth, taking her hand ; "and if you do go, there shall be one to comfort and protect you. Look up !"

"No, no," said Jenny, releasing herself. "He is your father—my benefactor and your father ; you must consult him—*his* wishes before all."

"I am tired of all this," said poor worried Mr. Franklyn. "Take your own course, go on in your infatuation and folly ; see what it will lead you to, —be a beggar if you will."

"Oh ! Sir, do not speak in that way," said Jenny, very generously interceding, though she did not know but that she would be drawing down wrath upon herself. But it was not her way to heed such considerations.

"Let him do as he pleases," said Mr. Franklyn, about leaving the room, "but he will rue it. Let him disobey his father and bring me to a gaol. What does he care ? "

"No, Sir," said the youth, again in a hot fit of heroics. "I know my duty as well as most sons. I think you have never had much to complain of in me. It is ungenerous. But as you thwart me in the dearest wish of my heart, what I have dreamt of for years—for months," he said, correcting himself; in fact, it was strictly but a couple of months—"I shall be passive, quite passive in the business. You shall send me back at once to India, to my regiment, to that climate which agrees with me so well. I shall go to-morrow, and leave a country that is odious to me."

At the news of this dreadful determination, consternation fell upon the entire assembly. It was known that a board of Indian doctors had sat upon the person of the youth, and had pronounced that the climate of that country would be utterly fatal—that he must get home with what convenient speed he could. The youth had, therefore, in so many words calmly announced that he was going back to certain death.

Mr. Franklyn abruptly quitted the room, and after a few seconds, the door below was heard to shut with a reverberating echo. The remaining actors in this distressing household piece stood regarding each other. It was a grim, horrid night—looked back to for long after as to a nightmare. The youth strode up and down,

pacing defiance, and repeating his grand determination of self-murder. Jenny Bell lay back on her chair staring vacantly, and almost stupified. Poor child ! innocent *fons et origo* of all these troubles. Even the sympathising sisters had fallen away from her with a species of dread, for they felt that it was coming to extremities.

It was long past midnight, and time for the scene to close.

CHAPTER IX.

SURRENDER.

In the grey of the morning candles were lighted, and a straggling hand-to-mouth sort of breakfast set out in the back parlour—hot and yet cold, raw and uncomfortable,—all for Jenny Bell, now departing. Even to the last the girls conjured her to stay,—these sad difficulties would pass by, but she was sternly inflexible. They wept profusely. She did not shed a tear, but was remarked to have a stony fixed stare, almost unnatural. She said it was her duty to go ; her heart might break, as indeed it was likely to do, but go she must. After all it *was* a “trying pass to come to,” for our Jenny was, indeed, next door to a pauper, and had scarcely a place, according to the hackneyed formula, where she might lay her head. These people, too, had been kind to her, and otherwise she might have had a home here for Heaven knows how long. So that this exodus was indeed a practical piece of heroism, for which she must have credit. Poor Jenny !

Mr. Franklyn was not seen or heard of. He was supposed to be up, for a note was brought in from him and given to Jenny. Poor child, she opened it eagerly. It contained best wishes, and so forth, with a very handsome money present, very princely indeed considering the fortunes of the family. Jenny said merely, "How good!" but did not, as might have been expected, make any noisy disclaimer. But it was found after she was gone, that it had been left behind on her table, with a grateful note for Mr. Franklyn. Oh, such a grateful note! She was to write, write often; *they* were to write, write *very* often. For the present she was only going to a town some fifty miles away by rail, where was some fossil relation—bones as it were in the drift. That was all that was known for the present. He in whose hands she was would direct all for the best.

The carriage was at the door. A cold raw blueness was seen over the trees. The candles burned with a melancholy flare. A single maid was up, and, pattering up and down, bestowed the last final offices—not, indeed, with enthusiasm, but with taint hopes of pecuniary comfort from the departing lady. The male servant was on duty, but with reluctance—for he, too, with a profounder knowledge of human nature, had but poor hopes. There was but a low estimate of Jenny, in this respect, through the establishment. And yet they misjudged her. Jenny was very sensible. She knew that no capital is laid out at such judicious interest as when placed in the Securities known as "Servants' Vails." She astounded the menial at the door with a handsome *honorarium*.

At last it has come. See Jenny going forth upon the world;—see her a young Roman matron, sacrificing her-

self for a family ! In our century these instances are uncommon.

Young Mr. Franklyn has asked for a few moments' speech in private. But Jenny thinks it more delicate firmly to decline. Her address and place of abode is, as it were, wrung from her.

"I will write to you, Jenny," said the frantic young officer. "*That* cannot be prevented—and—and—I will be true to you for ever !"

She shook her head sadly.. Better strive and forget her, for *both* their sakes,—far better. One last favour—try and carry out his dear father's wishes. Would he promise her ?

Anything but *that*. He takes her down to the carriage, supporting her on his arm. He walked with pride. *That* last office at least they should not take from him.

The girls follow behind, admiring his chivalry with a secret admiration. Some one carried a flaring light at the tail of the dismal procession. The male servant stood, "carrying arms," as it were, at the open hall door, out of respect for the liberal view taken of his services—but shivering. It was very cold indeed.

Embracing them all round—a clutch rather than an embrace,—a close adherence, as though they were never to be parted again. The youth took her out to the carriage.

"Ah, darling Charlotte ! I had forgotten her," said Jenny. "Give her my love—be *sure* you give her my love. And now, good-bye, dear Mr. Franklyn ! Your kindness, and—and"—Jenny hesitated—"generous partiality—I shall never—*never* forget."

"Angel!" said the young man, half in at the carriage, "you shall hear or see of me again, before long."

Jenny shook her head sadly, and drove away into the darkness.

Another wretched day, a day of gloom and misery, looked back to with a shudder by the family. Poor feeble-minded Mr. Franklyn was at his wits' end secretly, yet outwardly was wrapped up in a paletot of moodiness. For there was another departure getting ready.

Tin cases were in the hall, and that special pannier-shaped baggage, which is for the Overland, rested ominously on hall chairs; sticks, umbrellas, sword fishing-rod, all strapped together like a Roman Lictor's fasces, bundles of plaids and general wrapping, as though it were Christmas, and a blanket distribution among the poor were speedily to take place. Yes, young Franklyn was going away tragically, like a transpontine hero—rushing to certain death in the country of Curry. He was calm, and made no speeches; his sisters regarded him with awe, and even terror, but they did not dare to address him. Mr. Franklyn, too, did not appear, but kept himself secret, like a Grand Llama. Wretched day, indeed!

It came to dinner time. The chaise was to be at the door at 7 P.M., the same chaise that had taken away our poor Jenny Bell. The hero snatched a few mouthfuls,—he did not care to eat. What indeed *was* eating as a function of life, to one who was rushing to certain death? Certain death it was, say within eight or ten months—Porson had said so—our liver, my dear Sir, you understand. The frugal banquet was washed down with tears

and sobs, and the youth then got up hastily to get ready the last few preparations.

All then met in the hall.

Then forth came Mr. Franklyn, really ghastly pale and tottering— the first time he had been seen that day. He met his son full at the door. The son started back.

“You are going then, Charles?” said he.

“Yes, Sir,” said the other.

“Determined to—to—break my heart, to carry out your own views.”

“No, no, Sir,” said his son. “Don’t misunderstand me. I am doing all that you wish, sacrificing everything, even life itself, to——”

“I understand. Of course,” said Mr. Franklyn, smiling bitterly, “you must have your way. Stay, then. Do as you please; marry whom you will; I have no more spirit to oppose you.”

“No,” said the hero. “You shall find me dutiful. Let me go back to the Indies; an unwilling consent——”

“I am serious,” said Mr. Franklyn. “I had no aim in the world but your good—none, upon my soul! Our good I should say. . My dear boy, you know not what is involved in this step. I am no family tyrant, but pause, I do conjure you, before you take this wretched, fatal step!”

“I can say no more,” said the son, coldly. “I can do no more than obey you.” And he pointed to his mails ready packed in the hall.

Mr. Franklyn looked at him a moment sadly, then said, “Take these things up to the rooms again.”

CHAPTER X.

JENNY'S WANDERINGS.

WE may well fancy what a miserable, desolate sort of a journey was that made by Jenny Bell all that day, and what a cold dejected heart she must have taken with her. It was at best a decent sort of expulsion ; and unless she was supported by the conscious rectitude of the step she was taking, and that grandest of all moral sustenance, *principle*, it is hard to say how she would have got through at all. Only consider, a lonely, impoverished young creature, without a friend, without comfort, and with a blank waste of a future before her, hurrying away to a sort of fossilised relation, to a dry prison sort of household, where she would be treated like a sort of Magdalen. All the soft, warm colours of life were fast fading out ; she was every instant leaving a greater span between her and her dear friends.

Towards evening she came to the town where she was to halt for the night—a rude, raw, grimy place of abode, manufacturing through and through, and with a general tone of dull Indian red. Not a zephyr of sympathy fluttered down those grim gaol-like streets. It seemed a gathering of vast walls and a whole army of windows. It was all duress and restraint—all cold, hard ironed, —mechanical, monstrous, regular, noisy—unsavoury and sombre, with not a glimpse of anything soft, gracious, natural, or human. Men and women who were machines, like the machines they looked after, crowded at corners

—heavy hulking figures, who now that work was done, began to live in their own stagnant way. The manufacturing town was beginning to draw a sort of languid material breath of life, as lonely Jenny Bell drove through its streets to the “Queen’s Hotel,” a clean, bright, white house of entertainment, actually reeking of fresh plaster. A new, cold, Hotel Palace—Limited: very white inside—very rich in cornices, pillars, and entablatures, all in the most solid confectionery plaster that could be got. There was a hoist for taking up luggage to the different apartments, and electric telegraphy for communicating with the servants; a spacious “Ladies’ Coffee-room,” a library, and other inventions. Yet, somehow, it was a cold, cheerless, factory sort of hotel, quite in keeping with the factories among which it was set down.

A dreary welcome for a young creature. We may well conceive what an evening she passed; how she watered her simple crust—*that is*, the plain delicacies sent up to her from the “Queen’s” kitchen—with tears. We may fancy what a night she spent, and how sadly she sat in her chamber, and waited for the hour, when she was to go forward another stage.

What time that was fixed for did not appear very clearly. It was not known to the servants of the house, nor to the landlord of the house, who had not been told to send in that very modest account, run up from the day before, and whose extent did not tend to preserve that sense of honour and respect which in the Inn world is only to be acquired by large and liberal outlay. Possibly this indefinite date was not known to herself; but this is certain, the whole of that weary day she sat patiently in the manufacturing hotel, in the manufacturing town,

perched high in a sort of eyrie or roost, known as No. 160, and attainable only by Alps upon Alps of stairs. There was a printed tariff, with the various "Scales of Rooms" set down; and Jenny had chosen the most lowly. The waiter mountaineers made the ascent with ill-concealed disgust. There she sat the whole day, at the little window, looking down on the wains of wool crawling by with the solemn gait of elephants, and the rude iron natives, trudging past roughly, and on the bare red brick opposite, and the stiff, gaunt, soulless houses. It was a dreary wait for that poor outcast girl, yet who might, indeed, be there as well as elsewhere.

Evening then came on, and a reasonable speculation was abroad in the crypts below as to whether there would be any strain put upon their resources for No. 160.

Towards six o'clock, she still sitting in solitary retreat, a waiter mountaineer struggled up to her Grand Mulets, and tapping at the door, said there was a lady and gentleman in the "Ladies' Coffee-room" who wished to see her. Our patient Jenny did not start, but said, "Thank you," very sweetly, raised her eyes to heaven with uttered thankfulness, and, when the door had closed, stole over to the chimney-piece, and vacantly smoothed down her hair, with that almost instinctive prompting of the woman nature whenever she is suddenly drawn before the public. This unfriended outcast had, indeed, need of every weapon in the whole armoury of female trickeries.

And who could these strangers be, waiting in the "Ladies' Coffee-room?" The poor unfriended girl, tripping down slowly, may well speculate who could want her in the dreary manufacturing town. Who indeed?

Standing in the "Ladies' Coffee-room," where happily at this moment there are no ladies, is the faithful knight, so true, so trusting, and so loving—the brave young Charles—and his sister.

She gives a little scream as she sees him : it is so sudden. For a friendless girl here is one friend at least ! and then falls on the neck of the sister.

Jenny put out her hand, while a flush came to her cheek.

"This is kind," she said, in a low soft voice, for she was agitated, "very kind. I did not expect this."

The youth stammered and coloured, himself ; for he had all the engaging unsteadiness of youth, and the "ingenuus pudor," and was not quite prepared for the situation.

"So," murmured Jenny, "you have wished to see me once more ! This is kind—oh, most kind !"

"Jenny," said the youth with a blunt roughness which became him wonderfully, "you are coming back, you know. That is, it is all settled ; and—and—you are to come back."

"Yes, dear," said the girl, "you are to come back. Papa wishes it."

She looked at them with wonder, scarcely following their meaning, then shook her head sadly and slowly. From those divine tresses were shaken forth upon the worshipping youth a sort of ambrosial essence.

"No, no," she said, "those happy times are gone for ever. It is very good of you—oh, so good of you—to wish it ; but you know after what has passed, it *may* not be ! I must go my own way, out into the desert ; while you——"

"Dearest Jenny," said the youth, in an ardour of enthusiasm impossible to describe. You do not understand. It is all settled—all forgiven—you are to come back."

"Yes, darling Jenny," said the sister. "Papa has agreed; so pack up your things at once. We are all dying to have you again."

Over Jenny's face played a smile of affection inexpressibly sweet. Once more their mutual feelings found a happy issue in a strict embrace. But raising herself from the girl's shoulder, Jenny said, sadly but firmly—

"You are all too good—far too good! I knew dear Mr. Franklyn would do me justice when his noble heart had leisure to think of it. But it cannot be,—it must not!"

"How do you mean?" said the two together.

"It is impossible that I should return after—after—what has occurred. I—I—to bring confusion and discord into your united family! Never! The worst is over now. Better a thousand times that I should starve!"

It struck the youth that there was an air of noble resolution in her face, such as he never could have conceived. He surveyed her with wonder and admiration.

They were with her for more than an hour, wearying her with affectionate importunity. There was not an abundance of argument, for they were very young. But she was inflexible—almost sternly inflexible. They had actually to go their way at last, wringing from her a promise, to her a meaningless promise, given out of love for these two affectionate souls—that she would tarry there—thinking it over—until the morrow's evening. Even of this little favour she made much, but she could not

refuse these faithful, generous creatures. And so she agreed to tarry at the manufacturing town, in the blank manufacturing hotel, one day, for some indistinct whim of theirs.

They departed. The next day, went by slowly, and our Jenny kept lonely watch up in her eyrie hour after hour. Never was so patient a scout. Late in the evening cab drove up, and word was brought that there were parties in the "Ladies' coffee-room" once more—an elderly gentleman, and the same parties that were there the day before.

Down came our Jenny—as to impending execution. Here was Mr. Franklyn, not austere, or stern, but gentle and forgiving, and melancholy. She was ready to sink down at his feet, but he caught her with both hands, barely in time.

"It seems you must come back, Jenny," he said. "I have come for you myself. Charles's heart is so set upon it, that I will not oppose him any further. I don't think it a very wise step, but I consent. So, in God's name, come, and let us try and make the best of it."

"He is the best of fathers," said the youth. "He has forgiven everything, and has consented : so come."

The scene that followed it would be hard to describe.

Our Jenny was stern and inflexible, not to be swayed by arguments or entreaties. She held out nobly, and really won over Mr. Franklyn in what was with him a faint reflection of enthusiasm. He at last was actually joining in the other entreaties ; and finally, after more than an hour, she gave way, and reluctantly went up stairs to put back her slender wardrobe into her modest chest.

The poor outcast was brought away, and re-entered the old mansion of the Franklyns with a sort of triumph—for her, that is ; for the rest of the family now seemed to welcome her with a sort of awe and mystery, and even shyness. This was hard, for she had indeed been brought back under pressure. But she was now, a sort of mistress of the house *in posse* ; and in a week's time it was understood over the neighbourhood that she was the affianced bride of young Mr. Charles Franklyn.

CHAPTER XI.

A DISTRACTED CLERIC.

THE whole country, in amazement and yet in delight, welcomed the story. It was sent round in an incredibly short space of time, like the Fiery Cross. We are to love our neighbours, and search our consciences at night, for anything contrary to that precept of charity. Still, how welcome the news—not of his misfortune, Heaven forbid—but of his merely tripping over a stone, and stepping into a social puddle and being splashed !

People had been to the house of the Franklyns and seen Jenny Bell there. Some had always thought her a forward person ; some a retiring creature, so sly and quiet, and just the one to accomplish such a stroke. Some, smarting under that universal wound, which the withdrawal of a desirable single man from the community always induces—even where there has been no individual loss or chance of loss—were loudly indignant, and made no secret of their wrongs. A pert, brazen creature—an

adventuress—an artful minx—a privateer: these awful words were heard through some country houses.

Elderly persons now whispered to other elderly persons, with complacent condolence, that it was a great pity, a very great pity; for Franklyn had been gradually getting straight, but that he would never get over this. One special elderly person knew his property, Sir, about as well—as—anybody; but depend upon it this unlucky business would swamp him.

It was notorious in the country that the Franklyn barque was gotten among the shoals and breakers of pecuniary difficulty, and had there strained her timbers seriously, and was otherwise distressed. No one had, indeed, official notice of any such casualty out on the social high seas; nor had the agents for gossip at the parish Lloyd's yet received information of any misfortune. Still, there was that mysterious instinct abroad—akin to those rumours of defeat and misfortune, which unaccountably fill the air long before telegraphic wires have brought in the news,—that there was rottenness somewhere in the fortunes of the Franklyn family, and the neighbours were looking greedily for the waters to come rushing in.

It was the old story. The good old family barque had been floated down from generation to generation, but with every voyage was getting more and more “fouled” with the crustacea of mortgages and heavier charges. Each successor was more or less blameless, but was obliged to make fresh incumbrances to meet the existing burden of incumbrances that already weighed on him. It was the old story. There was nothing to show for all this expenditure; and those who were reputed to have

spent most money, had the least enjoyment of any while they spent. Mr. Franklyn did not game, or race, or keep hounds, or even ride to hounds. Yet he was growing more and more terribly embarrassed every day. There is no more dispiriting spectacle than this of a genteel family wasting by a slow but sure decay, with a sad pilot at the helm, who is struggling ineffectually.

Up at the Franklyns' there was a cloud of gloom and oppression, impossible to describe. The members of the family moved about as though there had been some recent domestic affliction, and the "remains" were lying in state in every chamber in the castle. When the first short burst of enthusiasm on our Jenny's return was past, this dreary tone gradually took its place. It was felt universally that some terrible misfortune had overtaken them; and yet, than our Jenny's deportment, in her most trying position, nothing could be more delicate or appropriate. She kept very retired and to the full as dismal as the rest, wept regularly for several hours during the day, and conveyed the idea that she was a fatal yet unwilling instrument in the hands of stern Ananke, or the pagan Necessity. Poor child, of that terrible power, or its great name, she knew nothing.

The youth deported himself curiously, and, it must be said, with not nearly her delicacy. He seemed conscious of the troubles his foolish purpose was to bring upon the family, and looked no one in the face, relapsing into a dogged demeanour; but he haunted his Jenny, and found indemnity there. He fastened on one of his hapless sisters, and outpoured upon her daily rhapsodical panegyrics of the virtues and beauties of his dear charmer. The child, for she was not very much more, had to listen,

wanting heart even to protest. In short, the sum and compliment of gloom and apprehension, and heavy weight upon the heart, if added up, according to arithmetical rule, would have made a very serious total.

There was one thing they were all looking forward to, which was to be a relief and a kind of cheer. The eldest sister of the house was coming home—was, in fact, to be home to-morrow. Charlotte, the good Queen Charlotte of the mansion, upon whom, since the night Mrs. Franklyn had left the Franklyns for ever, the head of the house leant affectionately, for all purposes of serious government.

A girl of “great sense,” everybody said; thoughtful, firm; one as against whom the waves of society would be broken into spray. One, too, that reflected a second or so before she spoke, and measured what might be the purpose of the speaker. This was the girl that came home of the Saturday night (about seven days after Jenny’s return), from her visit at the Cravens’—Sir Welbore Craven of that ilk; returned with all her baggage, *matériel*, and munitions of war.

A letter had told her what had befallen her family in her absence. Mr. Franklyn had written a bitter, almost despairing note, on which she quickened her departure.

Her welcome was universal—some cheer was spread abroad. It seemed to be understood that mind and stability were come back once more into the mansion. Faces lightened as she entered, and a sort of public confidence was restored. They would not be wholly wrecked.

The sensible girl accepted the situation readily, and said, “We must all make the best of it now.” She had

a long talk with her father in the study, and reassured him ; a short series of encouraging looks, and very few words indeed, more than reassured the girls ; it was enough that she was with them. But to her brother, who stood off at first shyly and almost guiltily, she conducted herself with a tenderness and delicacy that was wonderful, and finally gained him to her. She was the universal peacemaker.

To Jenny Bell, who was now so humble, so grateful, so obliging, so imploring to every single person in the house, from chief to scullion, she was especially gracious and encouraging. She seemed to ask her confidence, and no doubt felt for the delicacy and awkwardness of her position, being forced by an unwilling family to enter their ranks. Yet, some way in Jenny's demeanour towards *her* there was a constraint—an overdoing of the humilities. For, perhaps, she felt that the plain, sensible girl, who was so calm and straightforward, would put an ugly construction on her conduct, and misconstrue cruelly her own really fair and upright behaviour. It is not known whether this was indeed the secret feeling of the “sensible girl,” but she was strictly just and behaved to her with perfect impartiality.

No day was fixed for the marriage as yet ; for, to say the truth, there was no very marvellous enthusiasm in the family to hurry it on. The youth, Charles, his transports being now more or less satisfied, had delicacy enough not to importune them too eagerly. There was no need for haste. And as for that poor suffering Jenny, it was obvious she was least likely of the whole company to be eager for any special time to be named.

In this way the time passed by for a week or more,

and all in the house seemed to have grown used to the idea of what was now an inevitable necessity.

The Reverend 'Charlton Wells,' the lovesick curate, lived in the little town in lodgings, over the shop of the local apothecary, -for the present, at least. The rector was getting alterations done at his house, "throwing out" rooms, and had no accommodation for him at present. The little town was good three miles away from the house of the Franklyns, so he lived a very dreary, lonely existence in that dead-alive country town, over the apothecary's shop. This was his normal view ; but when he fell into that peculiar frame of mind in reference to Miss Bell, this sense of abandonment and desolation increased to a degree that the interior became of a sudden dismantled utterly, the walls stripped and barren, and the whole turned into the best reproduction conceivable of a prisoner's cell. He himself, too, became a reproduction of a prisoner dwelling in the prison cell, and looked out from its mean windows on the country-town street with the weariest heart. He viewed with a sort of loathing the dwarfed economy, the mere elementary traffic of the little community, the balls of string, the salt boxes, the open sack of flour, the starch and soap, and other insignificant items of traffic which constituted the stock of the leading establishment. The Franklyn Arms, next door, was no more than a miserable public. These features had struck his eye long, long before, but were endured with rational and pious toleration. But the whole was but a development of prison life and cellular system, and genuine back-of-God-speed existence.

Since the eventful night at the Franklyns' house,

when the Archdeacon had dined there, and which, when the guests were gone, had* wond up so dramatically, the Rev. Charlton had been away at the furthest corner of the county for a few days,—had gone with reluctance and returned upon wings. Then it was he heard of the break-up, and heard, too, of Jenny's departure. Then his parochial duties, his fishing duties, his fine broad, healthy enjoyment of country life—in fact, life itself generally—became utterly distasteful. He was crushed and almost desperate.

Joy came with Jenny's return. But with her came also the nuptial news, and the curate was crushed down once more.

On the Sunday came round his turn to preach; but a wretched performance he made of it. He came forth from the vestry all drooping and deranged, as though his ecclesiastical plumage were dragged and ruffled. He saw Jenny very distinctly below in the family pew, sitting there in a sort of modest tribulation, yet clearly with the halo or *nimbus* of affianceship about her head. With this encouragement, he took his rustic hearers, very indifferently, through some poor religious maunderings—the Gospel and water, as it were. Theologians of the congregation thought it miserable doctrine, and did not know what was coming over Charlton Wells.

That Sunday, after lunch, Miss Bell had stolen away to the garden, to the summer-house for solitude, as was indeed, her wont—for some way, since the arrival of the sister, there had grown up a gradual constraint between her and all the members of the family. She sat in the summer-house thinking—who shall divine what she was thinking of?—when in a moment the figure of the Rev.

Charlton Wells, with much agitation and a little wildness in his face, came round a turn in the walk, and stood before her.

She started. No wonder; an agitated cleric like this was disturbing.

"Mr. Charlton!" she said, "I am so glad—that is—it is some time since we have seen you."

"Miss Bell," said he, "I wish to see you—to speak with you. I hear such strange things;—that you had left—that you are to be married."

Jenny hung down her head in the summer-house. She must have long ago divined that here was one of those hapless mortals whom it was to be her destiny to distress—Heaven knows how unwillingly.

"I want to know the truth," said the agitated clergyman, "from yourself—that is. Speak to me—tell me all—for you do not know how deeply interested I am."

Jenny half rose up to go away.

"One moment," said the Reverend Charlton. "You would not be so cruel?"

"Cruel!" said Jenny, again drooping her head. "How little you know me! Ah, you are outside; you go about the world—the world of your parish, mix with men, and are busy with the holy concerns of your sacred calling. Ah, you cannot so much as guess at *our* sorrows—we who are within in a genteel prison—how we suffer and must not complain."

The Reverend Charlton answered bitterly—

"Suffer? Yes; what tremendous griefs these are which consist of station, wealthy position, and a good alliance. Then it is true?"

"Oh," said Jenny again, "how little do you know *me*, Mr. Charlton; me, the poor, humble outcast, dependent on others' bounty. To think that such vile seductions would tempt me. I say again, you know not what is passing—what *has* passed within. What has been *my* life, what *must* be the life of such as I am, from the beginning? Sacrifice—nothing but sacrifice—a wholesale strangling of our will, inclinations, and affections."

Jenny's eyes flashed, Jenny's cheeks flamed with colour, Jenny herself sank back upon the rude rustic bench of the summer-house, and once more hung down her head.

The clergyman exclaimed with rapture—

"What! do I understand that——"

"No, no, no," Jenny said, eagerly. "You are to understand nothing. I have said too much. Oh, forget, forget these words; I did not mean to be so open; I did not indeed."

"I know, I know," said the curate, rapturously. "It escaped you involuntarily—I suspected it. Dear, dearest Jenny, let me——"

"Hush, hush," said Jenny, rising in much alarm. "I must go—they will be missing me—asking for me. I must be at my post—you understand—you know what is expected from me. Oh, but you must forget those incautious words; never think of them again."

"Never think of them again!" said the clergyman, with fervour. "No, anything but that; thanks, a thousand thanks, for this confession. It has taken a load off my heart."

The eyes of Jenny sought him with a sort of wonder.

"Confession?" she said; "you must have misunderstood——"

"Thanks; I see," he said. "I am not quick; I do not take a thing quickly, but I mean well; I do indeed. But—but this sacrifice must not be allowed to go on. They—these people, must not be suffered to take advantage of your gentle and too-yielding nature. Some one must interfere; I will. They would not dare——"

"Hush, hush, hush!" said Jenny. "What wildness is this! Take care, I conjure you. You know not what you are doing. A touch, an incautious breath, and I am ruined—lost for ever. No, no, no," said Jenny, in the deepest despondency; "it is kind, most kind, but unavailing. The hand of man cannot help me now. The only possible course left is to—wait, to watch; to wait and watch. And you," added Jenny, devoutly looking up to the rude bark branches which formed the roof of the summer-house, "you will pray."

She put her fingers to her lips and passed out, leaving behind her the figure of the clergyman, wondering, perplexed, and yet, on the whole, much relieved.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. CROWLE.

THAT Sunday there was the family dinner-party. Mr. Crowle, who came out by railway from the manufacturing town where poor Jenny had spent such mournful hours, dined also. He arrived about half an hour before dinner, found no one in the drawing-rooms, and amused himself making exploring expeditions through that unknown country, turning over books, uncrewing puzzles, unlocking caskets, and, on the whole, amusing himself very pleasantly. Presently, he hears a step approaching, and drops into an arm-chair, and is found very busy with a large quarto photographic album.

Miss Bell was never late, and never kept any one waiting. She always, therefore, allowed a margin, for fear of an accident. It did not do, she was accustomed to say, for people in *her* station to run any risks. Here she was, dressed, and a full half an hour before the rest. *Their* margin would be on the other side, but, of course, *they* were in a different station.

"Ah, Miss Bell, Miss Bell," said the young man of business, gaily. "You have been just looking out on me from a little cardboard window, here," and he held up the quarto photographic missal; "and now you rise before me, as if I had called you up by an incantation. Let me congratulate you heartily, sincerely, on the joyful event."

Jenny looked at him reproachfully, as who should

say, "Have I not sufficient misfortunes without this cruel raillery?"

"Congratulate?" she said, appealingly. (It was a favourite mode with Jenny of carrying on a conversation, to repeat the last word of the preceding speaker, with a different intonation.) "Congratulate?" said she, reproachfully.

"Yes," said Mr. Crowle; "why not? Why not, now? Here is a suitable alliance—what is called 'a good match,'—all the neighbours call it so, and consider Miss Bell fortunate. Why not? Let me offer you a chair."

There was something in Mr. Crowle's manner which seemed to say, "I wish to talk to you;" and there was something in Mr. Crowle's manner which seemed to say, "You will please to obey me." Jenny Bell looked about her anxiously, as though for an opportunity to flutter away, but sat down upon a sofa, obedient.

"Why not? I say again," asked Mr. Crowle, nursing his knee, and looking quite a boy-man of business.

"Oh," said Miss Bell, "I'm sure I should be so grateful—so thankful—it is far too great a blessing for me; but, Mr. Crowle, it is the—the—intrusion into a kind, amiable family—a family that has loaded me with benefits that——"

"I see," said Mr. Crowle, positively looking no older than the cherub of one of the old masters; it was wonderful how persons could have any confidence in one of his years. "I see. No wonder, Miss Bell; a most natural feeling. Of course you like our young friend?"

Miss Bell looked up to the cord of the lustre, as to

heaven—an answer uncertain, and void, as the lawyers say, for generality.

“He worships you with a strong passion; you return that affection—why not? He is good-looking, young, generous, brave, and what not.”

Jenny again looked at the lustre-cord in the same general fashion.

“You love him, in short,” continued Mr. Crowle; “you are not indisposed to the alliance itself, which is reputed a good one—mark, I say, *reputed* a good one, and yet you are ready, at this moment, to sacrifice all—I am sure you are—all—prospects,—the youth, station, everything,—sooner than wound this amiable family. Most generous and most noble on your part, and, I must say, but seldom witnessed. I should not believe it if it was told to me.”

Our Jenny surveyed the young man of business a little uneasily.

“Oh yes!” she murmured, devoutly, “willingly, cheerfully.”

“It was the strangest thing from the beginning,” said Mr. Crowle, thoughtfully; “so sudden—so unexpectedly, so mysteriously forced upon you.”

“Oh yes,” sighed Jenny.

“You had been pursued—captured, as it were—brought from a neighbouring town; so I am given to understand?”

“Oh! yes,” murmured Jenny.

“And yet,” added Mr. Crowle, as if he was adding another to the Rochefoucauld maxims, “sudden things are often as precarious as sudden. There is no knowing what is in the future. I should be afraid lest your

darling wishes should, after all, be gratified, and this odious alliance averted."

Jenny started—ave, in fact, a violent conspicuous start.

"Don't die of premature joy," he said, smiling. "I fancy you think that news too good to be true. No—I know nothing. I have no right to say anything. I can't say what I might do," he added, actually smiling at himself into infancy, "if I were your enemy."

"If you were my enemy!" said Jenny, timorously, clasping her hands, and getting seriously alarmed at this strange mood of Mr. Crowle's,—“if you were my enemy!”

"If I was your enemy!" said he. "Does not the supposition amuse you? I am merely putting a case. You must know that a person in *my* position towards Mr. Franklyn and his affairs—a sort of genteel scavenger, in fact—must have a certain power. Any family arrangement could scarcely go forward without my—say my report upon it, which in this case would be unfavourable—if I were your enemy."

"Oh! Mr. Crowle," said Jenny, "you are hinting at something dreadful."

"Dreadful!" said the other; "of course it is for the advantage of the family. What are riches compared with domestic happiness? Of course. What is vile lucre—is not that what they call it—what is vile lucre to the woman we love? A cottage before a palace any day. Home before the world! • And so I, of course——"

Miss Bell was looking at him doubtfully, her eyes widening, and really not knowing how to answer.

"But I am Miss Bell's friend. I know she will make the young man happy. The only thing I fear is one thing. People in new stations are apt to forge old friends. You will grow proud, haughty, and, as Mrs. Charles Franklyn, keep Mr. Crowle at a distance."

"Oh! no, no!" said Jenny fervently, "never, never; you do not know me; you do not know me yet. You do not know Jenny Bell. Ingratitude is not part of her nature."

"Still," he added, musingly, "in your new position, you will want friends. No one can hold their own without friends; even an attractive young married woman."

"Oh!" said Jenny earnestly, "all *his* friends shall be mine. It shall be part of my duties to study that they shall like me,—if they would only," Jenny added, modestly, "be good to teach me, to instruct me. I want advice sadly."

"But I must have security," said Mr. Crowle, gaily; "material guarantees, as they say in the treaties, both from you and Mr. Charles. We will talk it over together again. Meanwhile, as one who is interested in you, and really wishes you well, I will tell you one thing: you are likely enough to be freed from this hateful alliance. You know that dear girl who has just come back—so sensible—so shrewd. Well, I half suspect *she* would be inclined to try and help you in the matter."

"Help me," said Jenny; "how?"

"How? In furthering your dearest wishes—in putting an end to the whole affair. This is merely my idea. I merely mention it as the result of my im-

perfect observation. Dear me," he added, "it is wonderful the way people come to me. What *can* they see in me? I have so little experience—I want advice myself."

"No, no, no," said Jenny, "you are so wise, so far-seeing."

"Well, so our kind friend Mr. Franklyn fancies; and tells me so. But that is his partiality. It is ridiculous, my dear Miss Bell, the way he depends on me. In this little business of yours he came to me. 'I leave it all with you,' he said; 'tell me what I am to do.'"

"Yes?" said Jenny, a little nervously.

"I said, 'Let the young people have their way.' To-morrow he will come to me and ask me, 'Crowle, tell me what to do. Are we to let it go on?' and I shall tell him——"

"Yes?" said Jenny, anxiously.

"Well," said Mr. Crowle, "that depends—upon events. Conscientiously one must be guided by events, you know."

"I have very few friends," said Jenny, sadly. "I want them sadly. I wish—I wish—you would be my friend, dear Mr. Crowle."

"Well, it is a great honour; we shall see. I must try and deserve your friendship. Oh! here they are at last. Miss Charlotte, how do you do? Come back again? We have not seen you, I don't know when."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE "SENSIBLE GIRL."

IN they all trooped for the grand family meal. And there was welcoming and hand-shaking, and benevolent Sunday geniality. The family was plainly putting a constraint upon itself, and making believe in neighbours' eyes to be content with the match, and nothing could be more delicate than the way in which Mr. Franklyn behaved to Miss Bell. The misfortune, for so it was considered by them, was still remote, indefinite, and all these poor condemned ones had still what is called a "long day" before them.

There was present the lovesick curate and his rector, the former something less dismal. There was present the family doctor and Mr. Crowle just mentioned. Miss Charlotte, the newly-returned daughter, was the conversational centre to which the tongues and eyes of all present turned. Upon her was the bloom and freshness of the outer world; she was charged with such novelty as there was in the party. Even in the light world of talk, as in politics, that old law of the rising sun and its worship most strictly prevails. She sat next that brother she was so tenderly considerate to, and told her adventures partly to him, partly to the general world of the table. Mr. Crowle considerably took all the gaiety on himself, and whipped up the flagging steeds of talk. He good-naturedly took office, for that night only, as the Wamba of the party.

On the other side of Miss Charlotte was the Doctor and the Doctor's daughter ; and these two, with her brother Charles, she laid herself out to entertain. She painted for them in detail all the polite orgies of that pleasant month or so she had spent at Craveyshurst, the ancestral seat of Sir Welbore Craven, Baronet ; she dilated on his glories, not for any self-glorification, but because the simple minds of the Doctor and the Doctor's daughter relished such details hugely. Seventeen thousand a-year ; prodigious state ; innumerable horses ; general magnificence. A genuine *old* place, with an ancient oak banqueting-hall, where men—that had been sleeping three hundred years in the parish, under what seemed to be monster hewn-stone caskets—had feasted. In the windows of that hall were mottled the gorgeous colouring of diaper ; the chromo blazing of blues, Burgundy reds, and amber yellows and quarterings. Such quarterings ! You could read the whole history of the family down in one of the windows ! Such alliances—such choice streams of blue blood turned on to commingle with the family current from rich and invigorating sources. And now even a mere younger son of the house, with but a moderate patrimony, was eagerly sought by a neighbouring family, and the joint relatives were filled with joy. The Doctor and the Doctor's daughter were breathless with admiration. They feasted on these details.

Noble people were coming from afar to assist at the function. Who were the noble people ? Why, Lord and Lady Mount Gingham, and Sir Thomas Skelper of Skelper, in the North ; old Lord Wigbury and many more. And yet he was but the younger son, which made it so curious.

Had Charlotte heard what settlements were to be made? (The whole table, even at a distance, was getting interested in Charlotte's series of clever pictures.) Well, they said Sir Welbore was giving "the young people" two thousand a-year to begin with. Her fortune was twelve thousand pounds; and on the joint amount, it was thought they would be able to get along comfortably, for a time.

But the fun was the busy note of preparation—the fitting out of Craven Hall for the festival. Charlotte was quite sorry to come away. Upholsterers—carpenters—furnishing was to begin presently, Sir Welbore was so pleased with the match; and for a younger son was very good.

"Certainly," said the Doctor's daughter, "family is a grand thing; blood is a grand thing; nothing, NOTHING like it!"

Charlotte, no doubt feeling a little for her brother on the right, turns to him good-naturedly, and says softly to him—

"Blood is *not* everything. Those painted windows and splendid alliances do not always bring happiness. Courage, dear Charlie; you in your little cottage will be as content as the prince in his palace."

The youth had been listening a little ruefully to the gorgeous details, and he caught eagerly at what his sister said.

"To be sure," he answered, brightening. "But why a cottage? Who was talking about cottages?"

"Why," answered the sister, "surely with one you really love, and have chosen, you would not mind in what position in life you were. You know, my dear

Charles, you will have to be thrifty, *very* thrifty. But what of that? I should not mind it if I was in your place."

Jenny Bell, opposite, was talking away gaily to her neighbour, yet moved a little restlessly, for she had a sort of instinct of what was being spoken; but Charlotte left the matter there.

The girls, however, were not inclined to leave the matter there, but came back to it with zest. They wished to know about the dresses, presents, lace veils, bridesmaids, and what not; and Charlotte had to take up the narrative again. The presents filled a room to themselves, into which visitors were taken for private adoration and admiration. Dressing-case from military brother; onyx bracelets from military cousin; exquisite *Sèvres*, an afternoon tea-service, from Viscount Hartle-top; enamel locket, with initials worked in diamonds, for the bridesmaids all round — these from the bridegroom. And Sir Welbore, so pleased was he with the alliance, had made a splendid settlement on the happy couple.

This was all more or less *mal à propos*, and half the company saw it; but the girls were so eager and curious it never occurred to them. But Charlotte was full of pity. Charlie had grown rueful again.

"We shall have none of these fine things," he said in a low voice to her.

"All vanities," said his sister; "all ministering to the pride of that family."

"Yes," said he, "and I dare say a mere mercenary marriage, arranged, as they call it, without a scrap of true love on either side."

Charlotte shook her head.

"I can't say that. No; I never saw a pair so attached, not even you and poor little Jenny opposite. My dear Charles, it doesn't follow because they have all these worldly blessings they are to be denied the happiness of liking one another; you are not to keep all the love for you and your Jenny. That would be a most unfair monopoly, wouldn't it?"

Next day, after lunch, Miss Charlotte—the steady, sensible girl, who looked after the house, cast up accounts, and took but little in the way of pleasure—said she would ride out, and would Charlie ride with her? Charlie had but newly come in from a sort of duty-walk with his future bride; but said gladly enough he would go. The future bride was up in her room writing, and from the window saw the pair ride by. The bright eyes shone brighter, and a curious distortion came upon the round, rosy face. Jealous? Jealous of the "sister-in-law? Absurd! Yet there is no probing the mystery of these love emotions — its complications and entanglements. But she kissed hands to them sweetly, and nodded and nodded again with the perseverance of a porcelain mandarin, until they were well down the avenue, and out of sight.

"Poor Jenny," said Charlotte. "She is very fond of you. You must try and make her happy, Charlie."

"Of course I shall," said Charles.

"She must be treated very carefully—delicately, I should say," continued Charlotte (they were walking their horses now). "You won't mind taking a little bit of good advice from me—the wise old lady of the

family. Eh, Charlie? You see, her position is a peculiar one."

"How do you mean?" said the youth. "You know as my wife——"

"Oh, of course," said she. "But you don't understand. If she is sensitive—as I know she is—there will be an awkwardness about her—her former position, you know. And these things someway are always borne in mind by the world, however insignificant the parties."

The youth got a little red. Charlotte saw the tip of the ear next her kindling.

"I know all that very well," said he. "I don't want to be reminded——"

"My dear boy," said she, "I knew you would be cross. But I mean it for your good—it will save you endless annoyance afterwards. A bold, manly course will be the best. Laugh at the world—make no affectation of glossing it over. Speak of it boldly, and never be ashamed of what you have done."

Again the tip of the youth's ear kindled. "But why *should* I be ashamed?" he said, indignantly. "I have done nothing wrong. I thought, in these times, it was more to a fellow's credit to pick out the girl of *his*——"

"Of course," said Charlotte, laughing. "The girl of his heart, by all means. And by the way—another little bit of advice, my own dearest Charlie. You know I mean it for your good, and I must speak, if you will eat me up for it after——"

"Charlotte, dear, speak away. You have stuck to me all through like a brick, and I should be ashamed to say a word to you. Go ahead!"

"What I wanted to say was—now don't be angry——"

that I wouldn't in public, you know, before people, be getting in rhapsodies about the girl of your heart. You are doing very well, and what is creditable to you; but alas! the world—the cold, practical world—only laughs at anything like sentiment; and I am afraid, according to its old, heartless creed, thinks you are making but a poor business of it.”

There was silence for a long time.

“There,” said the sister; “I know you are angry with me. I was foolish to have mentioned it.”

“No, no,” said Charles; “but I think you mistake. The world is not quite so bad as you make out. I have always been told that a generous action is sure in the end——”

“To be its own reward, like virtue,” she said, smiling. “Is that it? And so it shall, Charlie. And depend upon it, you will be very happy in the midst of little difficulties, and the pressure of a limited income. I am confident, Charlie,” she added affectionately, “when you get a little older and steadier, you will battle very successfully against any little trials you may encounter.”

Charlie said nothing for a full quarter of an hour. He looked gloomily down upon his horse's mane. Coming near home, Charlotte said timidly—

“Of course you will tell all this to the ‘girl of your heart’—eh, Charlie?—that I have been dispiriting and discouraging you?—but I think it is better you should both be prepared.”

“Not I,” said Charles, hastily. “I shall say nothing about it. What's the use? Jenny will only begin looking downcast, or crying, perhaps.”

Jenny was up in her room writing still, when the pair

returned. And the same curious twitch passed across her round cheek. Charlie did not go into the drawing-room and lounge there, as was his habit, but lit one of his Indian cheroots and went out into the garden, where he paced for nearly an hour. Towards dinner, he heard a soft step on the walk, and there was his Jenny in the shepherdess' hat, stealing towards him. They walked together up and down, Jenny amusing her future lord as best she could. She dwelt on the happiness that would shortly arrive for both—of their plans for house-keeping and internal order—for she really had a very pretty talent for picture-drawing and castle-building. Thus she gradually warmed him up into something like a little enthusiasm.

"Charlotte," she said, when he proposed going in—it was *he* proposed it—"your sister Charlotte—she is very fond of you, oh, so fond—so good, so noble, so devoted!"

"Yes," said he; "she *does* like me, I believe."

"Ah, she likes *you*," said Jenny.

"And likes *you*," said he.

Jenny shook her head.

"Impossible," she said; "how could she? She has grand ideas about the dignity of your family. She wishes to see them raised yet higher in the world, and she looks on me, naturally enough, as one who has fatally interfered with that. Oh, dear Charles, I am very unfortunate, very unhappy!"

Charles soothed her.

"She is ambitious," Jenny went on; "naturally so. She would wish to advance your family, and cannot understand those who are content with a little, and mere domestic peace. I admire her splendid nature, and wish

I could be like her ; but I cannot. I do not care for those things.”

The youth was then thinking of what his sister had said during their ride.

“Oh ! that is all very well, Jenny,” he said, “but we shall have to rough it, they tell me—to save a little, you know, and look after every penny.”

Jenny smiled, and gave a curious look.

She sighed. “No wonder they are cast down,” she said, “and take a gloomy view ; I should, were I in their place, and so would every woman. She is so fond of you, too,” continued Jenny. “She thinks naturally you are thrown away upon poor lowly Jenny. And indeed I begin to be afraid so.”

“Afraid of what, Jenny ?” said he, curiously.

“Oh, you know it,” said Jenny, dismally. “She has always been accustomed to think for you—to guide the family—dear Mr. Franklyn being so busy. And this, this sad business, being done without—that is, when she was away, you see. Ah, you should have consulted her.”

“Consulted her !” said the youth, a little scornfully. “I suppose, in an affair of this sort, I am old enough to choose for myself. Holding the Queen’s commission, I *should* think——”

“But dear Charlotte was not consulted.”

“But why should she be, Jenny ? I am a man. I am not under petticoat government. I am not——”

“Oh, I am very wretched,” said Jenny with a sudden burst of grief. “It had much better not be ! Disagreements in families ! No ; let me go and earn my bread—my crust, by honest labour.”

"Never!" said the youth, grandly. "My troth is plighted to you, Jenny. I am a soldier and a man of honour. You have a soldier's troth, Jenny!" And he led her in proudly, taking her arm in his, looking down on her to reassure her, much as the lovers lead off the stage the ladies they love.

He was very affectionate, even demonstrative, all the rest of that day, to his love, and looked a little distrustfully at the wise sister. To Jenny herself the wise sister was specially delicate, considerate, and attentive.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHARLOTTE VERSUS JENNY!

AFTER breakfast the next day, Charlotte called him over—"Papa wants to speak with you," she said, "in his room. I am to go too."

"Oh! I know," the youth sighed, "you are going to sermonise me. Surely, what is the use now?"

"You shall hear," said the wise sister. "Come!" And they went out together.

Jenny looked after them from her desk, and a quick flash of distrust passed over her face. And yet, how little she knew the wise sister!

For she would have heard Mr. Franklyn saying to his son earnestly, "Charles, I want to speak with you. This business is going on a little too long. It is a very important step you are taking, and must be treated seriously. I opposed it at first, but now that you have

my consent, we must act like men about it. What day are you prepared to fix?"

"Yes, Charles," said the wise girl; "you know papa has to arrange all his affairs, subject to this step."

"Would you like this day three months?" said Mr. Franklyn. "That would give you ample time."

There are some curious natures who do not like being pushed, ever so gently, into any step, even if they have an inclination for that step. The youth's countenance fell, for he had this special repugnance.

"But surely," he said, "father, there is no hurry."

"There is," said his father. "Besides, it is only due to the person you have chosen. She is to be your wife and we must show her the same respect as though she were chosen from the nobility."

Charlotte approved this speech, as being in exactly the key that she would have put it.

"We must treat her the same," she repeated, "as though she were our sister."

"In fact, I think three weeks would not be too soon, Charles," said the father; "there are no reasons for delay, no heavy settlements—no. In fact, it will be quite private. There is no need for any state or flourish."

Here Charlotte sighed.

"So, shall we say three weeks? I will engage that Mr. Crowle will not delay you."

"I see," said the youth, bitterly; "you wish to huddle me out of the way, as quickly as possible—I and my marriage. You wish to get rid of us. And yet, let me tell you, it is your own fault—all—for you were always telling me not to value money for its own sake, and all

that sort of thing, and here now, I choose a good and virtuous girl——”

“My dear boy,” said Mr. Franklyn, mildly, “you have done well, and I admire you for it—not as well as I could wish, but, I trust, still all will turn out well.”

“Then what are all these hints about ruin and misfortune? I’m sure I was always led to think we were well off—splendidly off; and now it turns out——”

“You were warned in time, Charles; it is too late now. Three weeks—this day three weeks. That is settled. Go and speak to Jenny about it.”

“Stay, wait a moment, Charles. Could you spare me a few minutes?”

Charlotte passed out.

“I wished,” said Mr. Franklyn, “to talk to you about the sum I can afford to give you. (I know you hate business, but Charlotte says, very wisely, I should speak to you about this matter.) We must look at things seriously now.”

Young Franklyn was indeed looking as seriously as could be desired.

“Charlotte says very wisely again, you will have to put your shoulder to the wheel, my dear boy; but we must all strain a point to help you.”

The youth said nothing, but kept his eyes on the floor.

“You will have to pinch and save at first, until—until we get straight, if we ever *do* get straight. Of course we shall eventually. But I am afraid, my dear child, three hundred a year and your pay is as much as we can spare you.”

The youth’s face grew more blank. “Why, I spend

that myself," he said; "more than that. Why, I owe three times that. No person, Sir, could keep his wife on such a sum."

"It is very hard, I know," said Mr. Franklyn, mildly; "perhaps with hard scraping we might get up a little more."

"But where is all the money?" said the youth excitedly; "I thought I was told there was to be plenty of money presently."

"So I hoped," said Mr. Franklyn, with a sigh; "in fact, Crowle had it all arranged, but——"

"Why, there's Smith," said the youth. "Look at Philip Smith. *He's* father——"

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Franklyn, sadly, "I don't know *how* they manage it. But dear Charlotte tells me *she* was an heiress."

The youth took his hat and stick, and went out—wandered about moodily for some hours, slashing branches and bushes impatiently. It is wonderful what a world of destruction he did during that time.

Two days went over from that day. The third brought young Mr. Charles a letter from his army agent. Would he be inclined to enter into a treaty for an exchange? There was Lieutenant Cogdyse, for whom the moral temperature of his own corps had grown too close, and which he was willing to exchange for the more stifling physical air of India. There were pecuniary advantages, too, in the transaction on the side of the youth. It was very unexpected, and very little looked for; so henceforth there was an end of going out to the tropics and dying there. This awkward alternative was cut off, which was a relief. Yet, strange to

say, he did not mention the proposal to any one, for that day at least, but kept the letter carefully in his pocket. The fact was, this Charles was no more than a boy—a mere boy. But half a dozen years ago he was greedy for a toy and within an hour was breaking it up.

Jenny Bell, we may be pretty sure, asked him concerning that interview in Mr. Franklyn's parlour. There should always be strict confidence between lovers. He told her eagerly; then seeing that he came out of it a little awkwardly, as one who was not too eager to hurry on the marriage, he stopped and grew embarrassed.

"They were in such a tremendous hurry, Jenny, for it—you know there is no need for our rushing into a thing of this sort. I must look about me. I must have time—it's very hard;" and he got red and confused.

"And your sister," said Jenny; "she was naturally anxious we should wait a little? So I thought."

"On the contrary," said he, "she was most eager for it."

"Ah," said Jenny, "so I thought—so I thought; naturally so."

The youth did not see this little contradiction in his Jenny's reception of his news, for, to say the truth, he had not a very logical mind.

"And don't you think, Charles, dear," said Jenny, in a very wheedling way, "it would be about prudent to follow our dear Charlotte's advice, for your *own* sake, leaving *me* out of the question? I can see, dearest Charles, that in this house, just at this moment you are.

what shall I say?—~~an~~uncomfortable—in a sort of doubtful way. Consider it ~~now~~, just for your *own* sake.”

The youth coloured up. “What, are *you* at it too? What are you all persecuting me for in this way? I must say I didn’t expect it, after all the sacrifices I have——”

He stopped, and indeed would have been a brute to go on, for there came from the now outraged Jenny a sigh—*such* a sigh! She sank down on a chair and turned away her face.

The youth’s heart was touched. “Forgive me, Jenny,” he said; “they worry me so. There—there now—I didn’t mean it.”

Jenny got cheerful in a moment, for she had wonderful control in her emotions, and she saw, perhaps, that the duty of soothing was fatiguing her young lover. They made it up, but he went his way thoughtfully, as was his wont, out into the open air, which had latterly become his *fancy*.

CHAPTER XV.

"BY LITTLE AND LITTLE."

WHEN he was gone, our Jenny thought it over carefully for some time, and perhaps resolved not to let him be long absent out of her company for the future. She thought Charlotte was up stairs in her room.

Charles, meanwhile, posting along the high-road, presently hears the clatter of horses behind him, and turning round is overtaken by the wise sister Charlotte, her hair swinging and tossing with the motion, and her cheeks coloured with the healthful exercise. Her groom rode as good a horse, so she pulled up suddenly and bade Charles mount; and on that, they both turned back into the fields.

The wise sister was too wise for balls and parties and the ordinary pasture lands of female life, but she loved her horse. She would have hunted, only she feared to scandalise the neighbourhood. She now proposed a famous ride across country, which her brother accepted joyfully. Both horses were fresh, and went over hedges, and ditches, and smooth fields, horsefully—(men do things manfully.)

The pair grew quite excited by their scamper, and after an hour's work, walked their horses home slowly, by the high-road.

"This is grand stuff," the youth said, having now quite got back his spirits.

"Delightful!" the sister answered; "it is heaven on horseback. We must go out often together, Charlie, and

make the most of our time. Poor Annie!" she added, stroking the mane of her horse.

"Why poor Annie?" said the youth. "What's the matter with her?"

"She is to leave us very soon. Poor Annie! You know papa is going to sell all the horses."

"Sell all the horses! No more riding?"

"And the carriages. No more driving, too. We are going to save, Charlie," she said, cheerfully.

The youth groaned. "Surely this is penury, beggary, starvation!" he said. "I never thought——"

"Oh, we shall do very well," said she, with encouragement. "Don't think of it, Charlie; we shall get on very well at some cheap watering-place."

"Cheap watering-place! What are you talking about?" said he, impatiently.

"My dear Charles," she said, "you must know very little of what has been going forward. Surely papa explained to you——"

"Oh, I see—I see," the youth said, with something like a groan.

"But we make the sacrifice cheerfully. We can do very well without horses, and if we can save the place——"

"Save the place! Oh, surely, Charlotte, you are not serious?"

"My dear boy, as for the horses or the house, they are nothing. But let me tell you one thing—you never, never can be too grateful to dear papa for all that he has given up to gratify your wishes in this respect. In fact I ought not to tell you, but he has sacrificed some of his darling plans for your sake; so I think, my dear Charlie, you should try a little and show it to him in some way."

"But I never knew," said the youth, much confounded.
"I should—I should have——"

"Ah, that was poor papa's delicacy. Now you must not pretend to know that I have told you. Did he ever speak to you of Lord Porkchester's borough?"

"To be sure! He always wanted it for me. He means me to be in parliament some day."

"Ah, *some* day. I hope so, Charles. You know Lord Porkchester had always refused him. Well, just as you were arranging—this—your marriage—there came a letter from Lord Porkchester——"

"What! offering the borough?"

"Yes."

"To me?"

"To you."

"Oh, by Jove!" said the youth, without a word more.

"Father had done him some service, and he was grateful. I was in the secret. Lord Porkchester's cousin told me of it over at Craven. Oh! I was feasting on the notion. Our having a Member in our family at last! It is the grandest of influences, when coupled with old blood. And as for dear father, you know how *his* heart runs upon that, and how he has toiled for it. Yet he gave it up, I assure you, without a murmur."

"But why wasn't I told?" said the youth, vehemently.
"Why wasn't——"

"While you," said his sister, "were to have been saved from that hateful India. Eternal leave of absence for parliamentary duty."

"But why," repeated the youth again, "why wasn't I told? why wasn't I——"

"My dear Charles, it is no use talking of it now. I only mention it to show how much we owe to dear papa, who has borne up wonderfully. As for parliament, horses, and that sort of thing," she added, pointing to the old house, "that is all over now. We must only try and make each other as happy as we can. Above all, be attentive to Jenny. Yet I am sure you will tell her all this, and that I am putting you against her. Well, I say candidly, I am sorry you got into it, Charlie. We should have liked you to have made a good match. But now that it is done, we must all help to make it as pleasant as we can. And very often, my dear Charlie, we are foolish in our wishes, and these grand alliances turn out very miserably. You and Jenny will do very well. But you must work, Charlie. Will you take the horses round?" She slipped down, and walked soberly in.

The rest of that evening the youth was very moody, and spoke very little. After dinner he lounged about recklessly, in and out.

"Come and take a walk in the hall," he said to Jenny Bell.

She laid down her work meekly; and, with a smile ineffably sweet, arose to obey his command. The younger girls looked after them; then looked at each other, as who should say, "They are gone for their accustomed meal of billing and cooing."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CROSS BEFORE THE NAME !

CHARLES walked up and down with her for some moments without speaking. She waited, and finding the duty cast upon her, as it now often was, said—

“Well, Charlie, dear, what were you busy with all to-day? Were you laying out any more schemes for your new life—our new life?”

“No—that is—not exactly,” he said, a little gruffly.

“Shall I tell you what I was thinking of?” she said, looking up into his face, and leaning on his arm. “Oh! I have laid out such plans. First——”

“Jenny,” said the youth, suddenly, and stopping short, “I was thinking that—that all this is very absurd.”

“Charles!”

“I mean this hurry—this violent hurry. What’s the necessity? Surely there’s lots of time: we are both young. And now, would you mind,” he hesitated and got red—“would you mind putting it off a year or two, or say two years or so, until we had time to—to look about us?”

Jenny did not answer, but fixed her round eyes on him with a deep searching look. She loosened her arm from his. The youth got redder, and dropped his eyes guiltily. She still did not answer: he grew dreadfully uncomfortable.

“I see—I see!” she said at last: “I was suspecting this.”

"Oh, no, no!" he said timidly; "it was not that."

"Not what?" she said, scornfully, and in a voice so firm and strong it quite startled him. "See how you betray yourself. Come," she added, more gently, "it is better to be candid, and speak plainly. Tell me, is this some pretext for breaking the fall—for going back? Come, Charlie; don't be afraid; speak out. Surely you would have confidence in *me*—your Jenny?" and she put on a coaxing air. "Come, let us have confidence in one another."

"Oh, Jenny!" said the youth, with effusion, "what will you think of me—what will you say of me? You are too good, too kind, and generous; and I am a poor creature that don't know my own mind. Just think; you *know* I am no more than a boy. I'm not accountable—indeed I'm not."

"Ah!" said Jenny, again flashing out. "So now the truth is out. This is what you have been hatching and plotting, you and your sister, these days back. Eh?"

The youth trembled. "No, no; indeed, no. It was not *my* fault."

"*Your* fault! No, indeed, you are not accountable. My poor Charlie, they have been tampering with you. *Your* poor weak nature could not think of such a thing. But it can't be, my dear child. Things have gone a little too far. You must try and reconcile yourself to the notion, however distasteful." And she nodded and smiled on him as sweetly as before, and took his arm.

The youth had the sort of courage weak people sometimes have, when they find the worst is over. He freed

himself gradually, and began with an aggrieved tone, almost whimpering in its key.

"It is very hard," he said; "very hard. Why should this be forced on me? I'm very young—too young—quite a boy, in fact. You must let me off for a time; indeed you must."

The gradually deepening look of scorn with which she was regarding him was indescribable. "Come," she said, "this is too serious a thing, Master Charles. I can't afford to release you. No. When you think it over, you will see it in the proper light. Come, be sensible for once. Go to bed now, and speak to me again in the morning." •

The youth was getting more courageous every moment. "I can't indeed," he said. "It was a foolish thing from the beginning; and, as they all say, there was an unfair advantage taken of my youth."

"WHAT!" said Jenny, starting back, and raising up her hand.

The youth cowered.

"You *know* I was a boy, and it *was* a *shame*—and they say so. And——"

"Go on," said Jenny, still looking at him with such contempt.

He did go on: "And I needn't go to India now; for I can make an exchange. I have the papers up stairs."

"Oh!" said Jenny.

"It is very hard to expect that I should ruin my family, all for a stranger. And it would ruin them, and you know it would. Why should I reduce them to beggary, and make them sell off the hunters and let the place?"

The aggrieved manner in which the youth made this declaration was really indescribable. He was getting bolder every moment,* as he thought he saw signs of weakness in Jenny.

Jenny listened with curiosity; nay, gave a sort of little start. "They have been frightening you, poor boy—things are not quite so bad—I know it. Ah!" she went on mournfully, "what a mournful lot mine is. And yet I have done nothing to her. I would not be anybody's enemy,—no, indeed."

"And who says you have an enemy?" said the youth sulkily. "Do you mean Charlotte?" He was thinking how exactly had come out what Charlotte had told him.

"Ah! you don't understand me," said Jenny, measuring him, coldly. "You are thinking of the childish stories of ruin they have been telling you."

"I tell you it is true," said he. "I know it. Papa showed it to me in black and white—I know he tells the truth. You don't think he tells lies, do you? He says we must work, and what not, and can only spare me three hundred a year. Why, it is beggary—starvation. Then I had a letter this morning. I thought they would send me to India;—I couldn't stand that. I needn't go now. I shall go to-morrow to London, and settle all about the exchange." He stopped then, and looked at her. "I say, Jenny, don't be angry with me. I can't help it—I can't, indeed. I know it looks shabby; but—but—I—I should be wretched if it went on. *There!* I know I'll never like any one so well." He was almost going to whimper again.

"Poor child," said Jenny; "poor, weak, feeble child! None of this is your doing. You've been tampered with. Never mind. Don't be frightened. You shall have your wish. You shall not be dragged to the altar. There."

"Oh, Jenny, Jenny," murmured the youth, "you are too—too good."

"There," said Jenny, "go now. You must do one thing, however. Say nothing, for to-night, of this business — take care you do not. I have a reason for it."

She quite spoke to him as a child, and with an air of authority quite new. He answered her abjectly, that he would not.

"Further, you must forget that we have had this conversation, mind. Never speak of it to anyone."

He answered in the same abject way, that he would take all care.

"Good-night, then," she said. "You shall be free. I have seen the change coming, and, you see, was prepared. After all, it would not have done. I have other views. Go to bed now, and sleep well."

He slunk away, up stairs, inexpressibly relieved. He was a mean, weak creature, indeed, as she said; but only consider, he was very young.

Miss Bell went slowly back to the drawing-room, sat down again, and took up her work. Charles was gone to his room. Headache.

Then she talked with them pleasantly, and in quite an unconcerned way, even with Charlotte. To her she was specially affectionate; and the sensible girl reciprocated. Then when it came to bed-time, she kissed them all.

round with such affection, and with such a soft air of sweetness and suffering resignation, that they began to think with self-reproach that they had not been near cordial enough to her, and would be better for the future.

She then took her candle and went to her room—her *little* room—fetched out her small travelling blotting-book, and began to write. Such a simple, noble letter, without pomp or flourish of self-sacrifice. Indeed, it almost reached to the heroic. She calmly did the duty that she proposed to do, without loss of self-respect. She told him that she had seen from the beginning that the thing was unsuitable: that he would at least do her justice to acknowledge that she had been reluctant throughout; that it was only at their pressing instances she had consented. Fortunately, it was not too late. It was nobody's fault but hers. Nothing could have been kinder or more tender than their behaviour. Mr. Franklyn's she would never, *never* forget. But again she must repeat, no one but herself was to blame; so that now, finally, she had determined that this business should come to an end. And this purpose of hers was irrevocable; nothing should change her.

She was not too proud, however, she said, to ask their aid in another direction. Possibly, Mr. Franklyn might not think it too much to help her on a little in her struggles through the world: such aid she would thankfully accept. She was not proud, thank Heaven, and could be grateful.

This she directed to Mr. Franklyn. She then tripped down stairs with the note in her hand—met a stray

servant—the last straggler of the tribe then up ; put it into his or her hands, with a gentle request that if they were going down that way, they would be so kind as to leave it at Mr. Franklyn's study. After that she returned to her room, went to her little hoard, and took out a little Letts' diary.

She was always a remarkably business-like little woman, and used to say, in her quiet way, that nothing she would have so liked as to have been a merchant's wife, and kept the accounts and totted the ledgers ; merchants' wives do not ordinarily keep the accounts and tot the ledgers ; but we are t to be too strict with her little phrascology. very day, however, she posted her little ledger, and kept the diary with great strictness. She had reasons for this exactness. She turned to the present day of the month, and began to fill in the space allotted in a fine composed little hand. She seemed to get a great deal into a line.

Any one looking at her as she wrote, would have seen the round face grow sharp of a sudden—would have seen the full-coloured cheeks turn pale, and the lips be compressed sharply.

For she was just then making a particular entry, which she did in a larger hand, giving herself more room, taking care, also, to underline it heavily. This was the name she wrote so slowly and carefully :—

“Mem. ”

“X CHARLOTTE FRANKLYN.”

And with great care she finished off a cross before the

name. She thickened the strokes with love, as though she were doing a little bit of art.

Having finished this little duty, she went to bed, and it is believed slept tranquilly.

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BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

JENNY BELL IN SERVICE.

A SPAN of say ten months is supposed to have passed by since that *dénouement* down at the Franklyns', when our poor Jenny, so barbarously treated by her weak lover, gave up her brilliant alliance, and so calmly made that little entry in her diary. The firmness of that poor lowly outcast was the admiration, not to say of the whole house, but of the whole county ; and she departed attended with a veneration that properly waits only on a saint. Her heroism was even more fruitful, for on the legend coming to Mr. Archdeacon's ears, he at once kindly thought of some London friends whom such a paragon would exactly suit, and procured Miss Bell admission to a desirable family circle. Her position was left in a happy duskiness, shaded off from the deep hue of companionship into the subdued tone of tuition, from thence into the more unmistakable domain of defined friendship. This was for the world outside. But she, poor child, always called a spade a spade, and said in a low sweet voice, but very plainly, that she was "going to be a governess."

And as governess she was already installed at the mansion of "Frederick Maxwell, Esquire, Q.C., Recorder of Pennington, Stone Buildings, Lincoln's Inn, and Chesterfield Street, Mayfair." Thus, at least, was he blazoned in the Books of Common Prayer which the bishops and priests of the sacred college of heraldry had put together for the use of the fashionable pious. And at Chesterfield Street, Mayfair, in charge of three girls, of various ages, was 'our Jenny now residing, and making herself very useful; for "the lady" (to use a fine word of fashionable Scripture)—"the lady" of Frederick Maxwell, Esquire, Q.C., the eminent working barrister, was then lying grievously sick, and all the authorised incidents of a legitimate sick-bed were then enacting up stairs. Frederick Maxwell, Q.C., might have been labouring down in a coal-mine, or digging at so many shillings a week. But here something must be said for Frederick Maxwell, Q.C., the eminent counsel.

His father was Sir Charles Maxwell, of Burbage Hall, in a ripe old county, and the son would by-and-by be Sir Frederick Maxwell, Q.C., or perhaps find himself some morning distributing rings and mottoes, and waken up as a serjeant, newly born into brotherhood with the judges. How would his style and titles then ring out? Serjeant Sir Frederick Maxwell, Q.C.? A tall, thin, and bent man, in the incidence of a human fishing-rod, with black hair, just silvering, black whiskers, silvering also, and a cold business face, sadly worn. He was in first-class parliamentary business; the vapours of hot committees were the air he breathed and loved, and the dull appreciations of county members

were his jurymen. His fees were parliamentary, too, which Mrs. Maxwell took charge of, and flung about gallantly. He was worked, in short, not by any means like a horse, which is a very unsuitable comparison, but like a human beast of burden or intellectual hack, which is the true standard. Did the brutes compare notes wearily as to their sufferings, the favourite object of comparison with them would be the parliamentary lawyer, whom one of their brethren draws down every day to Westminster in his brougham.

So Mr. Maxwell could scarcely be said to have eaten or drank (making merry was ludicrous), or, indeed, lived at all; but he was always before the Committee. Life for him was a Bill, and a Bill only! It was not made up, as according to the vulgar notions, of sun and bright skies and light air, and the softer social duties, or of gladness or griefs. His world was a Committee-room—"standing orders" his gospel, and when he had got his Bill through, he was saving his soul. When Mrs. Maxwell, therefore, grew sick, and as it seemed, ~~likely~~ for a permanence, the three little girls were helpless. If he would, the parliamentary gladiator *could* do nothing. It was too late to draw back, and he was bound to the Committee-Satan, body and soul.

Helen, Grace, and Mary—twelve, ten, and nine years old—were the three little girls whom Jenny was looking after in Chesterfield Street. It was wonderful how *much* she looked after—the sick woman, house, and girls, and apparently never absent from either, looked after everybody but Mr. Maxwell, who needed it more than any one in the world. He barely saw her, and when he saw her, barely knew her. She was not on a parliamen-

tary Committee. At breakfast a hand, Jenny's round, plump hand, set his cup of tea before him. For him, however, it was only a hand—possibly a servant's—for he had Sixth House of Lords' Cases tilted up before him on the toast-rack, and was taking in Lord Wensleydale and Mr. Justice Willes with his dry crust. The little girls sat round demurely and devoutly, and barely whispered while Lord Wensleydale was crackling between his teeth. So was it during dinner: House of Lords' Cases were not, indeed, set on *à la Russe*, but Lord Wensleydale was still fermenting in his head. He hurried through the meal, and got back again to the Committee-room, where his heart had been all the time. With one chief of the family sick, and the other virtually absent, what an invaluable person must our Jenny have been about a house! A perfect treasure!

CHAPTER II.

A COUNTRY VISITOR.

SHE had not been there a fortnight, when word was brought one day into the school-room that a gentleman was in the school-room for Miss Bell.

Jenny lifted her eyes with wonder: What gentleman? There could be no gentleman; she knew of none. It was a mistake, Jenny firmly repeated.

The menial said it was a clergyman-like sort of a person.

Jenny shook her head sorrowfully; why, it would be difficult to analyse. Yet it somehow appealed to Mr. Baker's heart, as who should say—"How were gentlemen or clergymen to come inquiring for me?" Mr. Baker held a very favourable opinion of the new governess, as one who knew her place, and spoke of her in the crypts below with a tempered approbation, subject, of course, to be corrected by future conduct; and he went back for further information. He returned with the clerical gentleman's card, "The Rev. Charlton Wells."

"Seeing gentlemen" is the forbidden fruit for the governess order—a suspicious transaction under all circumstances; but the cloth—the clerical neckcloth—took it out of the rule. So Miss Jenny went down, fluttered and hurriedly.

The Reverend Charlton met her with a boyish agitation; torrents of blood streamed to his cheeks; his

fingers trembled ; his speech was incoherent. Not so our Jenny, who as obliged to put on a demeanour quite foreign to her own native temper. She almost froze him up. But it was clear that any wild behaviour from this uncontrolled curate might be looked for ; and such visits for a young thing entering on life were highly compromising.

"I did not expect to see you here, Mr. Wells," she said, coldly. "Have you any message or business ?"

The curate's utterance staggered fearfully.

"I came," he said, confused, "to—to—see you !"

"Oh !" said Jenny, "you came up from the country expressly, I suppose."

"Expressly," said the curate, eagerly ; "for no other purpose in the world."

"I see," she said. "A costly journey."

"Were it ten times as much,"—he went on.

"Stop," said she ; "stop there. I am afraid I see the whole depth of this infatuation of yours. I thought we had talked over this folly, and that you had seen it in a proper light. No ! no !" said Jenny, sadly shaking her head. "And the Franklyns, I suppose, told you where I was."

"No, indeed, I found it out myself. They refused. But I came up here ten days ago, and have hunted all London, I may say, day and night ; and at last, only this morning did I succeed. And now, Miss Bell—*dear* Miss Bell—I *must* speak again. Now you are free. Then——"

"Free !" said Jenny, with a dramatic tone and significance worthy of the stage ; "free !"

The curate understood her, and was delighted. He rose himself at once into melo-drama.

"It is to rescue you that I have come," he said; "to cast off those fetters. Too well I know what must be the degrading servitude of a—a—"

"Finish," said Jenny, smiling; "I do not blush for calling."

"Come with me," he continued, rapturously; "those comforting words you spoke in the garden have never been forgotten. Come with me, Jenny, my own Jenny; there are bright hopes before us—a glorious future; we will link our fortunes together, and together walk through life."

Jenny was listening to this burst as calmly and as collectedly as she did to one of his Sunday sermons. But something at the close troubled her. All along she had heard the world—the world of the country parish—say that something was to be done for that excellent young man, Wells; and there was a belief that hands would be stretched out of a cloud to furnish him with a misty bit of preferment—also, by-and-by. From his confident style of speech, perhaps, the blessing had already come; and our Jenny wished to have the ground quite clear before she spoke.

"But," said she, gently, "you talk of facing the world. Do you know what facing the world is?"

"Fighting the world—doing battle with the world—struggling valiantly to the front, and arresting the prize from the hands even of the unwilling!" said the curate, with flashing eyes.

This seemed sufficiently plain, yet Jenny would hear a

little more—would be certain—before she spoke. She shook her head sorrowfully.

“But until the prize is won,” she said, “we must support the vulgar function of living.”

“Enough for me,” said the rhapsodical curate, “enough for me the presence of *her* whom I love ; *she* would be the loadstar—perish wealth, perish——”

Many other matters were to perish also, which Jenny did not take heed of. It was sufficient. There was no rectory as yet. He was only anxious to secure his loadstar first ; hereafter Providence might do the rest. Jenny might naturally be aggrieved by the effrontery of such proposals ; but from her manner no one could fetch an idea of what was passing in her mind. She was no doubt too noble to wound so simple and trusting a heart.

“These are all dreams,” she said, rising, “dreams of the wildest. Still, wishers like you and me may, at least, have the luxury of dreaming. But for any form of life to be based on these dreams”—she shook her head sadly—“it is not to be thought of. Not as yet, at least,” she added, with a glance at his blank, despairing face ; “not for years, at least, till the highway opens, and the landscape clears.”

This was not Jenny’s habitual tone of speech ; but she adapted it to the occasion.

“But,” said the curate, wistfully, “we can work together—cast our lot together.” (It was quite certain about the rectory now.) “This strong arm——”

Jenny’s brow contracted ; this strain was growing tiresome. She rose.

“I am afraid,” she said, “I must go ; I am a genteel slave, and must go back to the galleys.”

Suddenly an idea seemed to strike her ; a curious smile passed over her face—a flash of joy.

“You are going down again to the country ?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said, despairingly, “I suppose so. What does it matter *where* I go ?”

“Because,” she said, “if it would not be too much ; and, after all, it *is* asking a great deal——”

The Rev. Charlton Wells grew eager again.

“Anything, anything,” he said, “only tell me.”

“Well,” she said, “you will be in the country ; you will be with those dear Franklyns, my best friends, my protectors ; you will see them often, every day ; would it be too much trouble—would it be asking too much—to let me hear from you now and then about them ?”

Again the curate’s spirits leaped up. This was a blind, a poor pretence, for hiding a deeper interest in *him*. He saw it all. He answered, ecstatically, that he would write—write—write always, every day, and for ever.

“*They* write, of course,” continued Jenny, ruminating—“they are very kind ; but I should love to hear of them from others—to hear about them—the minutest, the most trivial details will be welcome.”

The curate, overflowing with joy, would fill reams of paper.

“And that dear, sensible girl, Charlotte,”—and, as she mentioned the name, one of those curious twitches, before spoken of, contorted her face for the space of a flash, and which the Reverend Charlton Wells took for pain—“that dear Charlotte, all about *her*, if you

please ; all that you hear : her little ways, and what she says. Oh ! she was so kind to me in my trial ! you can have no idea how kind she was. She gave me this little bottle. It's a foolish wish ; but you, *your* delicate nature will, I know, understand me."

She held out her hand. The curate, consoled, proud, and overflowing, took it with *effusion*. He had got a commission. Skilful women, wearied with persevering lovers, who will not retreat without offence and sore wounds, often thus artfully pacify them. Then Jenny, suddenly discovering that she had been too long away, fled—rather floated—away like a vision. The curate's heart was sore and aching ; and yet she had laid some balsam on it. That commission ! How woman-like, how gentle—how absurd, perhaps, if weighed critically ; yet, how like her.

CHAPTER III.

THE LOVESICK CURATE.

THE noble creature went back to her obscurity again, to the humdrum drudgery of child cultivation ; she had had a little glimpse of the world outside, which was not to be for her ; she had stood a moment at Eden's gate—a sort of governess *Peri discónsolate* ; and had even secured for herself, by this willing instrument, a sort of thread, ever so fine, to join her to those sweet old associations. Who could blame her for looking back through the bars of her prison-gate ?

The curate went down exulting. He came home to his first floor over the shop in his mean country town, and it did not seem to him quite so blank, or so bare. The flavour of provisions did not ascend to him quite so rank or strong.

For the first night or two he had company over his little cottage grate—for it did not rise to much higher dignity. He lay back in his chair, and wasted many precious hours idly dreaming, and entertaining this profitable society. He constructed all manner of theatrical pictures, which seemed to him very sweet and soft—with figures in the centre ; and one figure (arrayed in silken vestings and general clergymanical finery), doing much chivalry. He put this *poupée* into all manner of splendid situations, made its face impressive, its speech slow and grand, while its interior heart was being racked and wrung with agonies of love, jealousy, rage and despair.

He made it retire in noble situations, with dignity and indifference, filling those who were left behind with wonder, curiosity, disappointment, and unspeakable admiration. Miss Jenny Bell was always left behind under these emotions.

In these proceedings in lunacy, were several useful nights consumed. There was a sermon for the approaching Sunday lying on his desk, the first page of which had been "got in," but which he did not suffer to interfere with his amatory meditations. He had now a curious repugnance to this setting together dry religious bones into improving shapes ; and it seemed the most dreary, dismal task, that man could conceive. Here, however, it was now come to Saturday morning, and the thing must be scrambled over somehow.

He used to delight in his sermon-making. He used to touch and polish, and refine, and repair, and read choice passages to the young ladies, in anticipation. He was proud of the work ; and the young ladies used to talk over at dinner little neat odd bits, small scraps of originality which struck them. His soul was then all in the parish. He was enthusiastic. Now, a spiritual dryness was come upon him.

He leant a little to the new theology, and was fond—merely in an amateur way—of turning over in his fingers the prettier portions ; just as he would admire a little china teacup, or a bit of filigree. He and the young ladies had ever so much æsthetic talk about the nonessentials. He had all the Oxford Fathers, bound in green, looking down from the shelves ; and was in the habit of saying, there was really much originality in some of Doctor Newman's writings. He wore, too, a lovely silk

waistcoat, which seemed like a little black silk *san benito* covering his chest altogether, with a hole to allow easy exit for his neck.

The Sunday sermon was not much. It was unavoidable that there should be marks of haste, which might be pardoned, as the missionary work was heavy; but it was short—offensively short. Long sermons may be soporific; but there is a latent respect implied in their length. Brevity brings with it suspicion of a contempt or wish to be rid of the duty speedily, as being done per contract. It was said even there was loose, careless doctrine,—but these were the sectaries of Calvin.

This unsteadiness, these irregular flittings to London, had been noticed, and were spoken of. Very grateful were such topics to the parish, long hungering and athirst for some really good substantial nutriment in that direction. Then he went over to the Franklyns to dine very eagerly. He was longing to begin his duties in that other more profane parish to which he had recently been appointed.

The Franklyns were all there. Mr. Franklyn was something more cheerful, but all the rest of the family were in very high spirits. There was slow and secret chatter, and quiet innuendoes, which mystified the Reverend Charlton Wells. But it was clear there was some good news afloat. Amiable family, always so kind to him, so thoughtful—he was glad of it, for their sakes; and he was already composing the first sentence of his Jenny's letter—embodying his report.

Mr. Archdeacon was there again. He was measuring "that young man, Wells," with a cold and pearly eye. He took him in, as it were, surreptitiously across the

bridge of his (Mr. Archdeacon's) own nose. Wells was privately considered slack in reference to the Dissenters. He had not been beating the Nonconformist thickets with Church horns and Church hounds. He was not a true religious sportsman. Mr. Archdeacon liked none but able-bodied workmen under him. He shook his head over "that young man, Wells."

The young man, Wells, did not heed him: he was bold and careless, and did not, at any time, reverence ecclesiastical authority too much. It had been found out, with delight, that he, latest of all, had seen their dear Jenny, their noble Jenny—was fresh from her presence, and could give the newest details. He glowed up as though his cheeks had been stirred fiercely like a fire, but was not detected, as he was hardly full in the light. He then entered upon a minute narrative—delicious task—was stopped, made to stand and deliver, with questions from this side and that pointed at him, and told the whole delightful story. No one more interested than the sensible girl. It was a charming evening.

Mr. Archdeacon caught a word or two afar off, in reference to London. He heard his clerical chattel dwelling enthusiastically on each incident of the expedition. He dropped his account of the last successful Dissenting *battue*, and, contracting his archidiaconal brows, looked warily over across his own nose, as it might be across a hedge. On the first opening he raised his piece and fired—

"So, it appears you were in London. Hey, Mr. Wells?"

"Yes, Sir," said the other, "for a short time. Well, as I was saying, Miss Franklyn, I found out the house—

was shown into a parlour. I really had no idea at first that she would see me——”

“You enjoyed yourself apparently,” Mr. Archdeacon struck in again; “I suppose you found time to attend that grand meeting of the Missionary Feeder Society, Lord Buryshaft in the chair?—I suppose one of the most magnificent organisations, as yet untainted by Dissent, the world has seen.”

Mr. Wells was waiting in his London parlour, and did not relish being checked on the verge of his interview, so he answered, a little stiffly: “No, Sir; I knew nothing of that valuable Society. I went up to London with quite other views—for a particular purpose, in fact——”

“Then I must take leave to tell you, Sir, that you neglected a valuable opportunity—one that may never return. It is impossible to estimate the seriousness of such an auxiliary engine as that. And I may remark that in these days, when Indifferentism is making such strides, and when there is a curious carelessness abroad as to the duties of the spiritual pastor, the wolf—the wolf, Sir—is abroad.”

The Archdeacon’s eye at this moment falling on the doctor of the village, with a sort of abstract fierceness, that professional person said, timorously—

“The wolf, Sir?”

“The wolf of Dissent, Sir,” said Mr. Archdeacon, savagely, and now for the first time seeing him—“of Dissent—howling Dissent. It is prowling nightly about our farms and homesteads. And no wonder, Sir, when the shepherds sleep. Sir, the Church of England, by its spirit and canons, is universally a missionary church. I

have spoken to the Bishop about it. The Bishop sees it as I do. He joins with me in thinking that Dissent is howling. You shall hear an allusion to it in his next charge. Sir, you did wrong to pass by so glorious an opportunity. You did wrong, Sir."

Mr. Wells' cheeks were glowing at this public attack. It was, besides, undeserved; for he had done a good deal of fowling in the Dissenting direction. He was rather exulting on the strength and enthusiasm of his Jenny* Bell attachment, and ecclesiastical concerns seemed very small and indifferent to him now.

"There must be some mistake, Sir," he said. "This reprimand can scarcely be intended for me. Arising, too, out of a little harmless journey to London! I think Mr. Archdeacon can scarcely be serious."

"Serious, Sir, when the hydra of Dissent——"

"Can scarcely be meant to entail eternal residence. *That* would turn us into white slaves in orders. As for that Missionary Feeder Society, I look on it as——"

But the sensible girl, seeing into what fatal perverseness—ruin to his own prospects—this curate, barely fledged in his Church, was hurrying, struck in—

"You are not going to deliver the bishop's charge to us now,  Archdeacon," she said, smiling. "Only consider; what is the proverb about meat for strong babes? We are all strong babes here."

"*Strong* meat for babes, Miss Franklyn," said Mr. Archdeacon, much pleased to be allowed the correction. "That is the shape of the quotation. But Church discipline is always seasonable. I recollect so well the late Bishop Stinger remarking to me," &c.

The remark of the late Bishop Stinger was of that

valuable sort which always leaves a sort of surprise on the hearer's mind, why it should have been rescued from obscurity, and then ventilated by the agency of frequent quotation. More useful was it on this occasion, for it turned away the wrath of an ecclesiastical Habakkuk, and prevented an unseemly dispute. But the clerical Captain marked the careless tone of his private, and registered a mental memorandum that for the future he would keep him specially in view, and if possible have him conveniently on the hip. Anything like insubordination in the ranks would not do for him, in an enemy's—that is, in a Dissenting country.

The curate then resumed his London adventures, for a select circle, and painted in his Jenny Bell with much warmth and force. The girls listened with devotion. Miss Franklyn, the sensible, showed the deepest interest—and kind and delicate interest. No wonder; perhaps she felt compunction for the stern part which duty had forced her to take up.

The flushed face of the Rev. Charlton Wells was turned towards her with a gentle sympathy. He was grateful, and already composing his bulletin—delightful duty, which would turn to Paradise the low chamber over the village huckstering shop—determined to give her a sweet and pleasant place in his first despatch.

Through that domestic banquet he was diligently taking notes all the while. Various allusions, more or less intelligible and unintelligible, were shifted past his ears,—shafts from the family jokery, which were winged diagonally across the table, back and forward, from side to side. These were in that sort of spoken cypher, the key of which is with the members of the

family circle, and the use of which in presence of strangers has even a sort of perverse fascination. This was clearly pointed at the sensible girl, and took the shape of gentle banter in reference to some knight or chevalier, with whom there were indistinct relations, as to what Brantôme would style *de par amours*.

According to the mild and peaceable procedure of the present century, our forefathers delighted in this agreeable shape of baiting, and called it, in their old-fashioned dialect, "rallying." Rallyed, then, palpably was Miss Franklyn, as it seemed to Mr. Wells, who, wrapped up in his own special *de par amours*, as in a cloak, would otherwise have been indifferent, but being now accredited reporter, opened his ears. Some one after dinner—a confiding junior girl of the family—unboundedly communicative, and a chartered "conduit pipe" for all manner of tattle, told him further particulars with delight. The fact was, "Young Craven" rather admired Charlotte—had testified this approbation rather publicly. Young Craven was lovely in the eyes of man, one of the Elderborn Heroes, a Sultan under an entail; in short, "desirable," which is the most splendid encomium, and unites all the gifts. At various houses, he and the sensible girl had met, and mutually admired. He was brave, generous, noble, good, chivalrous, spotless, and deserved the fair, as none but the brave—that is to say, the Elder Brave of the family, who alone are brave, and deserve such fair as are to be prizes in the arena. This Mary or Jane, junior, so indiscreetly free of heart and speech, and rather flattered at being selected as the channel of information, told him many more particulars, what hopes they had, how "nice" he was, what diffi-

culties were in the way, which were few, and what encouragement, which was much; and "what fun" the whole thing was generally. But the grander "fun" of all was in the fact that "Young Craven" was coming there on a visit very shortly, and would stay a long time, when the amount of extra "fun" that might be looked for was almost incredible.

At the end of the night Mr. Archdeacon went his way in a sort of archidiaconal gig—a simple and apostolic vehicle, whose horse had never yet crunched a morsel of Dissenter-grown oats. He shook hands dryly with "that young man," whose clerical temperament was of so low a tone, and wrote his pencilled mental memorandum over again in heavy ink. The young man went *his* way with a sort of defiance, got home to his huckster's first floor, lit his lamp, and went eagerly to work.

Before he went to bed, he had written abundant particulars. She would like to hear of Mr. Franklyn, head of her old home, so he sketched him with detail. More natural, still, she would love to hear of the dear female friend, nearest to herself in age,—of the sensible girl, in short; so he dwelt on her portrait, with lavish finish. All she had said and done; all she had looked and then, coming to details, enlarged fully on that sort of child's gossip, knowing how grateful it would be to his Jenny. "I have lost not a moment, dear Miss Bell," he wrote, "in letting you know this happy rumour. I have no very great faith in their nuptial castle-building; but I am sure you will be glad to learn even any fanciful speculations about our common friend. She is looking well—better than ever; intellectual, and—as some think—handsome. But personally, I want a sixth sense to

admire her. She is not *my* style. I could, if it would not take up too much space, describe what is my style. I confess I am not for that utter spirituality of figure." (Miss Franklyn was slightly made ; our Jenny was round and sinuous.) "As we are doomed to earth, I am not for approaching the ethereal *too* prematurely." An elegant conceit here suggested itself which he longed to set down ; something about taking the trouble of going to the pier-glass, and *that* would save all description of *his* ideal. But, some way, it seemed to him to have a rustic flavour ; for the rest, it was a delicate bit of imagery—almost Elizabethan—but which he saw required desperate courage to carry through. With a sigh, then, he forbore the pier-glass and closed his letter. That delightful labour done, he slept very sweetly that night—the sleep of the just curate.

Mr. Franklyn was still pursuing his melancholy duties. He went down sadly into that hold of his, with a mournful regularity, striving, it would seem, to bail out his incumbrance with a sort of Danaid's pitcher. He was neither the better nor the worse for his labours. At most he only established a sort of desperate equilibrium apparently, only getting rid of what fresh water entered, and not letting it gain.

CHAPTER IV.

VISITOR LOOKED FOR.

THE young man of business came very often, and was a great service disentangling accounts, raising, or more properly trying to raise, loans; for money was terribly scarce, he said, and the market was labouring under an affection known as tightness. Yet, some way, it was loose enough for the rest of the world. For that unhappy gentleman it was permanently constricted. Charges seemed actually to accumulate. Interest on moneys had to be met at periodic times, which came so close that the whole year seemed as one periodic season of interest paying. Nay, there was one annual payment—interest from railway mortgages—which merely glided through Mr. Franklyn's hands, he being trustee, and which, unaccountably, seemed to give him trouble and delay, and which at times he could not forward without receipt of pressing letters. It reached scarcely to five hundred pounds half-yearly, being interest on a sum of sixteen thousand pounds in the railway. And yet this mere clerical office caused him much trouble and even agony as the day drew near. Kindly did his invaluable friend beg him not to perplex his head with the thought; he would arrange it all;—leave it to him. At most, signing a formal paper would be all that would be required. He, Crowle, was well used to business; from which friendly and well-meant proposition Mr. Franklyn literally shrunk away nervously. No, he must do all that himself—by himself. Still he fought on; staved off

liabilities, one by one. It is wonderful how the evil day is so successfully fought off, and for so long.

Mr. Crowle meantime continued to come, and was really very agreeable in the house. He kept a good deal with the ladies ; and young as he was with Mr. Franklyn in business, became specially younger with the other sex at moments of relaxation. It was wonderful that he should carry the whole stock and share lists, state of markets, even the Honolulu Fours, in his head, and he so young. He used to come twice a week, but now came three times. He played at small plays in the evening, and even the sensible girl, who professed never to relish him, owned that he was not nearly so bad, after all ; and consider this—he was so young, said the sensible girl.

Later on he began to drop in for two days running ; later on still even oftener. He was very welcome. A place at the hospitable board was always kept ready for him. At a country mansion, a cover more or less is imperceptible. The dinner-table expands or contracts naturally, like caoutchouc ; and the company of all that he most affected was that of Miss Franklyn the elder, the sensible girl.

Curious to say she seemed to take much interest in the conversation of Mr. Crowle, the young man of business. She had a very practical mind, that Miss Franklyn, and delighted much in the arcana and general mechanism of any special calling. And Mr. Crowle had an easy knack of popularising stocks, their rise and fall ; shares, bulls, bears, purchases for account, and other secret mysteries of the exchange, in a fashion that was really entertaining. And on this subject she used to get him to enlarge very copiously.

This little train or chain of events continued to spread itself out continuously for a long time. Mr. Crowle came just as often, and almost oftener. One day he was in the garden pulling flowers carelessly, and in a pastoral fashion, quite delightful for one of his nature, when one of the younger girls came bounding and scampering along the walks to meet him. She was a child of good humour and spirits; and when five or six years younger, had filled the awful function of *enfant terrible*.

"Ah, Mr. Crowle," she said, "tell me a secret; who are the flowers for? Come, now, you are getting quite a beau, Mr. Crowle; every one is remarking it."

Mr. Crowle was anything but a man of business in his dress, and almost verged upon dandyism. This was his weakness—to be considered, in an innocent way, of course, a man of gallantry. He was enormously pleased.

"Whom do you suppose they are for?" he said smiling. "For the old lady in Threadneedle Street?"

"Nonsense," the young girl said, gaily; "for some one a good many hundred miles nearer. Confess now; we know all about it."

Mr. Crowle might, indeed, have been pulling them for the old dame just alluded to; and if he had been pressed for the truth, would have to own that they were for his private dressing-table, it being part of his dandyism to love flowers, as a shape of decoration. He was curious about these hints, and suffering his mouth to distend into a smile—

"Ah! you are too wise, too wide awake! You are growing up now, Miss Adela, and we must look out if we want to keep our secrets."

Delighted at this compliment, she came up to him confidently.

"Such fun as it was," she said. "Last night, you know, we plagued Charlotte's life out about you, Mr. Crowle."

"About me," said he, and then shook his head softly. "I! No, no; always funning."

"But, oh yes, yes!" said she. "And do you know what I said? Guess, now."

"Something wicked?"

"Yes; I said she had now got a beau in the Three per Cents. Ha, ha! Wasn't it good?"

Mr. Crowle said it was very good, and at the same time very wicked. He was, at heart, rather confounded by this disclosure. Still, with this little bit of nature before him, he might try all manner of experiments.

"How full of fun you always are, Miss Adela," he said. "I envy you your spirits. It is too much honour for me, poor Louis Crowle, to be named in the same breath; a knight, as you say so cleverly, of the Three per Cents."

"And Beau in the Stocks, ha, ha, ha!" and the girl went off boisterously into peals of laughter.

He relished it just as much, and went on sweetly—

"Exactly; and would a grand lady so wise, so good, so noble, so sensible, as she is—and I really, Miss Adela, have often wondered in secret at a woman being so sensible."

"Oh, Charlotte is very sensible," said Miss Adela, growing grave of a sudden, as with the responsibility of the sentiment. "Everybody says so."

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Crowle, in a gentle enthusiasm;

"she is above us all. Ah, Miss Adela, she is not to be named with a Beau in the Stocks."

"Don't be so sure of that," said this odd child. "I could tell you something, but I won't. It would make you too vain." And then bounded away. And by-and-by she was telling her junior sisters what fun she had with Mr. Crowle, and how she had humbugged him into thinking Charlotte was in love with him.

• These juniors were all she-Arabs in the house, and what is called badly brought up.

Mr. Crowle finished gathering his flowers, and thought how cleverly he had played upon this bit of nature. No one knew so well as he his chances and his station, and how almost ridiculous would be such an idea, when taken in reference to such a person as Miss Franklyn. He was a shrewd, sensible person himself, and almost smiled at the notion. Still, *he* was not moving in the business; and with the dilapidated fortunes of the house, who knows, but that this might be some family scheme. He would welcome it with all heartiness. His father was a carrier—a living carrier; and the currying process was every day spreading to his sensibilities. He would wait events and make no sign; and so went in with a certain elation. Something had been sown which might come up years after—a very remote growth, but, still, something agreeable to speculate on.

In the drawing-room he was marvellously agreeable, and the youngest young man of business ever dreamt of. As he ascended the stairs, he feasted on pleasing visions of the future.

He was a very sensible "long-headed" man, this young man of business, and there was no vulgar forwardness in

his demeanour that night. If there was any change, he was more retired. Still the idea of purifying that currier streak out of his system came back to him very often.

The evening post had just come in, and was opened greedily—like all posts, morning or evening. The letters were sorted and distributed by unpaid officials. Mr. Franklyn got his—a good many; the young ladies theirs—a few; Mr. Franklyn went through his slowly and without enthusiasm. No wonder, for they seldom bore him a horn of good news. Looking over one specially, he hemmed audibly twice or thrice, which was known by the family as a sign that he wished the attention of the crowd to be directed to him. The crowd became silent and eager.

"Dear me," said Mr. Franklyn, "this is a little sudden, I had not expected him so soon."

"Who? who, papa?"

"Young William Craven; he is coming to-morrow. Still I am very glad. A room can't take long to get ready."

This was supposed by the populace to be Charlotte's admirer *en titre*. So, conscious glances went round, and the girl who had lately been in office as a "terrible child," but was still holding on, as it were, a minister without portfolio, jogged her neighbour and laughed aloud. The sensible girl was not the least perturbed.

"The front room, I suppose, papa?" she said.

"How long is he to stay, papa, dear?" said one of the family.

"A week, he writes," said Mr. Franklyn; "but of course we won't let him go so early. He is a most

agreeable young man to have in a house. You will all like him."

The ex-terrible child said demurely, "Of course! What does Charlotte say? Eh, Charlotte? She is the only one that knows him as yet."

"You will see to-morrow," said the sensible girl; "it will be a wholesome lesson for you to curb your impatience."

"Something splendid!"

"A noble youth, of course!"

"All the virtues!"

"Adonis! Brave, haughty, gallant," &c., &c.

These were all so many shafts launched at Charlotte. Not one hit.

"She is getting red—look!" said the ex-terrible.

"Foolish children," said the sensible girl, quite cool and unmoved, "you should be all sent up to your nurseries."

CHAPTER V.

JENNY AT HOME.

UP at Chesterfield Street things were gloomy enough. The lady of the house was to be ill in permanence, better one day, and more than worse the next. Doctors came in flocks—four at least—on the day fixed for a consultation; and their four decent carriages, quiet, demure vehicles, kept about the premises, in a sort of procession, as though they had come already for the funeral, and were waiting for the hearse.

Two of the medical gentlemen wore white ties, and were about as clean and varnished as clergymen; the others were rude, disorderly persons, not too nice with their razors. The sick lady up stairs was, metaphorically speaking, in the hands of one of the medical gentlemen, —she was the Case, and *his* Case. He had taken out his licence, and these were his shooting grounds. He took his three friends up stairs to exhibit his prey or quarry, not without a certain pride. He lectured over her fondly; said now and then, “You see, ch?” to which they answered in dry chorus, “Ha, hem, quite so!”

He took his stethoscope out, applied it to the chest of the patient, and for some minutes seemed to be looking with his ear through a sort of telescope. His brethren, then, all came in turn, and looked as though looking with their ears through a telescope. The profound wisdom and ineffable depth of knowledge portrayed in each professor’s face, as he withdrew his face from the operation, it would be impossible to describe. This species of

autopsy on a living subject being concluded, they then withdrew, gravely, and even sadly, and adjourned to a private chamber below to consider their verdicts and take sherry and biscuits. That verdict was scarcely encouraging. Lungs "touched"—liver "touched" a good deal—general interior economy all more or less "touched"—and, above all, heart "gone."

"You see," said Sir Hervey Parkes to Jenny Bell, trying to work his throat free, as it were, out of his white collar; "you see, it is very critical—very critical indeed. Our patient's life is on a thread—on a thread—a breath—a motion—you understand." No agitations—no sudden shocks—everything soothing—ev-e-rything soo-o-thing—you understand."

Jenny's mournful eyes fixed themselves wistfully on the physician-in-chief. Oh! so sadly and wistfully. "What?" she said, and her round full fingers became clasped together; "no hope, Sir? Do you mean that? Oh! Sir." The distinguished physician took her for the affectionate and best loved of all the daughters. He had been pleased with her quiet manner all along. She deserved his approbation. "My dear Miss Maxwell," he said, making an uneasy effort to work himself free from his collar, "I don't say that. We may work through—for—oh, dear me, yes—an indefinite period. But we must have care; an emulcient treatment—if you can follow me in the use of the term—strictly emulcient. I must speak plainly, and put no fine points on the matter—hem, you will understand. But the fact is—our dear parent—yours, that is—is in a critical way. A breath—a gust—and——" Here the eminent practitioner finished the sentence with a gentle snap of his fingers.

"Still, with care—oh yes—with care, with kee-air," and he finished this sentence with an up-and-down movement of his head, which, in the language of the human person, is significant of mild encouragement. He was very much pleased with Jenny, and went away saying to his brethren : and so "well regulated" (that was his word) a girl for a sick chamber he had rarely encountered.

It was Jenny's function to press the daily fee into the reluctant palm, according to the surreptitious laws of the guild. She performed the unholy action with the conspirator-like stealth proper. Shall we live to see the time when the barristerial community shall accept *their* fees in a stealthy, 'skulking' fashion, with averted eyes, and a hand protruding backwards from the folds of the gown, into which adroit attorney shall chink his gold? Is the Guild of Mediciners the only one whose delicacy is to be consulted?

The suffering lady, then, up stairs, was to float on smoothly to the end of her days. Every nerve of the family was to be strained to ensure her quiet. Everyone was to creep up and down and about the house with cat-like steps. The worst was, she was sharp of temper, testy, a faded fashionable lady, long out of office, chafing against restraint, and eager for the fray again. She put no faith in these old lady stories of "heart gone," and "touched lungs;" she would be well in a month or two. So here was the problem, that "emulcient" treatment it would be hard to fit to such a subject.

CHAPTER VI.

THE "SCOUR VALLEY" BILL.

MR. MAXWELL was wholly outside such associations, yet not indifferent as a husband. He was more dull than indifferent. What could he do? He was being worked like a beast of burden; he was being driven round and round in a sort of committee ring, performing legal "scenes in the circle," from morning till night, with attorney gentlemen in the centre scourging him round and round. "The committee gentlemen sat in the boxes and looked on. He really *would* have grieved—grieved sincerely—had he been given time for that emotion. But his brain was greedily absorbing everything—feelings, emotions, sensibilities, even will. The demon of sixth House of Lords' cases had entered into him, and had swept the whole premises clean. It had brought other demons' reports, and the statutes—terrible lodgers—who kept the House all to themselves. What could he do, save, indeed, furnish to Jenny, who gently suggested it to him in the morning, supplies of those golden eggs which the medical profession requires the patient-goose, or goose-patient, to have new laid every day.

But besides, Mr. Maxwell, Q.C., was now plunged deep into a tremendous pool of railway battle, and was struggling across through heaps of floating, stagnant matter. There was now actually before the committee the Scour Valley Railway Bill, promoted by the Monster Leviathan Line of the country, the huge Polypus Company, which

was stretching out feelers north and south and west, and in those directions crawling over the face of the land. One of their feelers took a little bend, which on the map might be as the curve of the little finger ; and these giants now proposed sweeping direct through this lovely Scour Valley, a sweet pastoral nook, dear to anglers and trout lovers, in order to cut off about eight miles of country. As the grand Polypus flew screaming through the kingdom, express, this was supposed to save ten precious minutes of vast importance to commercial gentlemen of the bag. And yet, reasonable as this project would appear, in those days when economy of time is so justly considered, it was opposed—opposed grudgingly, snarlingly, not with tooth and nail merely, but with claws, and fangs, and talons—opposed incomprehensibly by another monster society, a sort of Midland Polypus, in whose instance the Legislature, having made a clean cut transversely across the kingdom, gave them a sort of interest, which stretched away at both sides, and every year increased. These two grand Polypi, one crawling away northerly and westerly, the other diagonally, indirectly, as it were, shared the country between them, and in some way obstructed any smaller schemes which broke out in those directions. Welcome to each were their legitimate spoils. But there were angles where the Polypi came near, and almost entangled their feelers ; and there were little choice and dainty spots over which the shadow of the Northern feelers hovered, and over which the Midland longed to crawl, and over these debatable bits there was terrible railway “bad blood” and locomotive soreness. So was it with the Scour Valley line, for which, up to that moment, no one

had been solicitous, and of which few had heard. A wretched little water-shed. The eight-mile saving of time was a pure blind. It was all a mere sham, and over that wretched little corner the two monster societies fought out their deadly quarrel.

The committee-room where the judges sat was as a sort of museum lecture-room, frame-work being introduced, on which were spread out plans, sections, elevations, a perfect acreage of cartridge paper, as though that branch of the Honourable House had turned itself into a gigantic laundry, and was striving to get through a large order in the table-cloth direction with as much speed as possible. Things were set out with a lavish effort at simplification, a magnifying over and over again, so as to bring the idea (whatever idea it was) home to the meanest (committee) capacity. You could walk at an easy pace round the room, and follow the whole course of the Scour Valley line, displayed in brilliant colours, and brought conveniently on a level with the human eye. This was on a scale of some three yards or so to a mile, which are magnificent proportions in engineering plans. But lest even this magnitude should not reach to the committee, there were elegant extracts, as it were, of the Scour Valley line portrayed in gigantic cartoons at higher elevations, like the full-length portrait of "a gentleman" at exhibitions; to be reached and have its beauties expounded by the agency of a wand. These works of art were distinguished by monster lettering and the flashiest of colouring, so as to reach speedily to the committee's intellectual level. Its easy lessons might have done for a metropolitan infant school, with diagrams hung round, speaking with a superfluous intelligibility to the eye.

Thus on the lower level was made out indistinctly a little pale blue bridge which actually crossed this notorious river Scour by two arches. Higher up, this bridge had of a sudden developed into Brobdignag proportions, and had every stone distinct and conspicuous. A little more to the right, in the same region, was the bridge again, only cruelly cut across from pathway to pathway, and labelled "SECTION."

A good deal turned upon this bridge, and on the Scour generally. The bridge was of the Northern Polypi; but in a handsome sort of way the Western Polypi were coming forward to protect the owners of the adjacent banks, fishing rights, and general privileges, and were even prepared with a plan of their own, which would take the line—their own—across the Scour at a high level through a lattice bridge. There were models, too, of both bridges, witnesses in platoons from the Scour Valley, squires and engineers in regular corps. There was what is called a "strong" bar for both sides. There was much printing, much lithographing prettily done and coloured, and bound up with counsels' briefs, and furnishing those gentlemen with some field for absent or vacant scribbling. Everything was lavish and of the best, the paper the very finest. The eminent parliamentary agents spared nothing, knowing pretty well that nothing would be spared to them. They showed all the considerate munificence of undertakers (as they were indeed in some sense) at a moment of a bereavement.

Mr. Maxwell was on the opponents' side, the injured Westerns, who had been forestalled by the greedy Northerns. The fight was desperate. No one would have known him: the absent, vacant, timorous man of

domestic life, now became noisy, combative, and actually collaring Boggs, Q.C., with ferocity. The two rolled over each other, griping their throats, with loud snarlings, many times in the day, until Mr. Marshley, M.P., came and tore them asunder. They wrangled over witnesses as over bones. Mrs. Maxwell never knew the Maxwell of the committee rooms; it was another man. Had she heard his voice she would have passed by, and not owned him.

The witnesses—such witnesses!—who stood there, herded helplessly like the cattle which some of them drove; who hung about the galleries with a timid air—with a proud air; who sucked sticks; who wore agricultural coats, with capes who hugged primitive umbrellas affectionately; who seemed to have a vested property in the local solicitor, and clung to that unhappy officer as with a sense that he was responsible for their maintenance and keep in the great Babylon; who were getting lost, and being brought back ignominiously; who were getting drunk and utterly helpless—a perfect burden on the wretched solicitor, who, besides the labour of telling over his men about a dozen times in the day, like a sergeant his soldiers, was besides encumbered with a helpless *caput mortuum*, sadly gone in drink. This alcoholic affliction at times took the shape of frenzied violence, of loud screams, and general combativeness, which were, however, not to be controlled by the arm of the law, the introduction of which would wound a witness's sensibilities, but had to be soothed into tranquility by the wretched local solicitor in person.

The engineers were remarkable. On them seemed to rest the whole burden of the case, and they knew it.

Four were marshalled on each side,—short and wiry engineers, tall and burly engineers, spectacled and unspectacled engineers, all fighting the battle with the zest and hostility which belongs to that and to the medical guild.

When Mr. Tummins, C.E., the local professional, was placed in the chair, to support the Northern Polypus view of the Scour Valley, and had his plans put into his hands, and was examined by Boggs, Q.C., with a skill and fluency, and familiarity with technical terms, which would have led a careless public to suppose he had handled theodolites in infancy, and had been busy taking levels all his life, four pairs of engineering eyes glared at him from the other side of the table, and at each answer four heads came together and tossed contemptuously, and four mouths uttered disparaging whispers. But what was this to the time when Mr. Bagley, C.E., the “eminent” engineer who had constructed the famous Bilston Reservoir, and built that wonderful viaduct of fifty-six arches across the river Leathy, under which a seventy-four might pass with the greatest ease—which was justly the wonder of the empire, but had made the shareholders bankrupt; when this gentleman took his seat in the chair, and with a calm, smooth impassibility, gave his testimony, the engineering eyes opposite were awed into respect. Only one, Mr. Cox, C.E., almost “eminent,” also associated with some “daring” bridges, which had excited wonder, but impoverished shareholders, was consumed with a secret gnawing envy, and turned yellow. His examination—Mr. Parsee, M.P., the eminent parliamentary counsel, had reserved him for himself as a sort of legal tit-bit—

occupied nearly two days, and when the committee rose, it was known that his cross-examination would be undertaken next morning by Mr. Maxwell, Q.C.

These counsel of parliament have wonderful gear and machinery, strangely universal. The wheels and cogs and drums of their brain fit, by a little adjustment, any description of material. They are omnivorous, and can take in and work up wheat and chaff indifferently, medicine and drugs, machinery and the nice laws of mechanics, mathematics and formulas, optics, refraction of lenses—as when dealing with a lighthouse patent, and all the niceties of poisons, so as to be fitted to do battle for a couple of hours with Doctor Taylor. Let all this multifarious range be once "briefed" to them, and it is ready for entering the machine. It is all one in the legal parlour the night before; a single handle sets all to work. Round*fly the wheels with hum and burr. The properties of matter, the co-efficients, the densities of iron, the strain it will take without breaking, and such awful matter (awful, at least, in being played with *viva voce*—reasoned upon *coram publico*) as the formula:—

$$ab - \frac{a^2}{2c} = \text{twice the focal distance.}$$

These are wonderful magicians certainly. And such a magician certainly was Mr. Maxwell, Q.C.; and feeling the responsibility of Mr. Bagley, C.E., the "eminent" engineer who was held over for his special handling on the morrow, he was now down in his workshop digesting civil engineering and all its intricacies.

CHAPTER VII.

JENNY'S HELP.

LEVELS, gradients, one in thirty-five *bridges* "askew" and otherwise; traction; these things fly off like sparkles. Still their briefs are barren enough, and he must have principles, broad and bold, which shall have a fine ringing sound in the committee-room, and confuse Bagley, O.E.

For this end he bethinks himself of an ancient Cyclopædia (Britannica, or Scotica, or Hibernica), splendidly garnished with diagrams, gorgeous cuts, dotted lines, and what not. It had been useful on a former Bill. By-and-by he rises, and begins to burrow among Measom and Welsby, Carrington and Payne, Tudor's Leading Cases, and Parkins' Appeal Cases. Do what he will, however, he cannot find it, and stands with his hand to his weary forehead at about nine at night, in a cloud of dust. Suddenly it occurred to him—the girls. They loved picture books, and it had been borne up stairs, subjected to rude usage, and converted into a toy.

They were aghast at the apparition of that awful face! On the little circle fell consternation, from gentle Jenny downwards, who presided. The girls were working; Jenny sat in an arm-chair, a comfortable article, and read (to herself) out of an octavo volume covered with white paper. No doubt she was fortifying herself for the next day's scholastic duties, for in shape it was like their French "Lecteur;" yet why cover up so use-

ful a manual with this tenderness? Jenny almost gave a little shriek or gasp, as the lord of the mansion stood before them with his pale face, then stood up respectfully, and slipped her handkerchief over the book.

None of them had seen the book of plates. In truth they were not capable of that profanation. Bear away a sacred volume? No, indeed! What if it should have toyed out Parkins on Appeals! Those volumes they regarded as actually instinct with life, and had an undefined terror that those of the folio order would, on any insult, fall and crush them, like the helmet in "Otranto." Timorous sounds from all sides repudiated the notion, and the apparition, with an audible and deep-drawn sigh, seemed to fade out into darkness.

This troubled him. The briefs were so *very* barren, an unusual blemish in documents of the sort, and he began once more delving, burrowing, shovelling, among Parkins and Co., tossing them out like clods of earth and lumps of clay. He was blinded with dust, and yet his labour was ineffectual, and the hours went by. With a sigh he gave it up, and went back to his briefs, as it drew near to twelve o'clock.

Suddenly the door opened softly—very softly—and Jenny glided in; the round, compact figure of our Jenny. He looked up from his paper absently, yet was not astonished. He thought she had come to ask for something, and looked up inquiringly, with his pale face; then, when he found she did not speak, dropped it again, and relapsed into the Brief world. In a moment he had forgotten her. Our Jenny had a velvet foot, though so roundly made—tripped across to Parkins and Co., Measom and Welsby,—lying all tumbled and

in confusion—and went down on her gentle knees like a maid-of-all-work.

For three-quarters of an hour she mined and laboured in the dust, until the round full hands became all grimed, and then, in a corner, lit upon the engineering quarto. She got up, captured him, drew him from his ambuscade, wiped him down with a cloth (poor Jenny knew little about proper dealings with the book family, who should have the dust blown tenderly from them, or they become greasy), set it gently before Mr. Maxwell on the table, and floated softly from the room. Anything so considerate, so tenderly done, and with so little of pomp or flourish, it would be hard to conceive.

He did not wake up into the world for a good half-hour afterwards, when he was plunged suddenly into an engineering slough, and thought again of the great Cyclopædia as a sort of helping hand to draw him out. Then his eyes lit on the familiar chiel just beside him, blinking at him tranquilly. He was confounded—amazed—for he knew the space was vacant but a moment ago. He puzzled over it a few seconds, yet without losing time, which was precious; when the figure of our gentle Jenny rose before him—a picture, too, of her delving in the corner. Gradually it took shape; and as he turned over the huge books, he said, quietly —“A thoughtful act—a very thoughtful act indeed.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORY OF "A FINE WOMAN."

THE early portion of the life of Frederick Maxwell, Esquire, Q.C., would not bear much microscopic power. He sat lost in the wild prairies of embarrassments, bills, straitened means—in the district where no sun shines, and where the air is close and unwholesome, and where there are mephitic vapours rising from swamps, and where there are unclean and dangerous beasts of prey abroad. For long he had actually lived, helplessly, among these creatures. They had him in their power. He was ankle-deep in the swamps, and could not extricate himself. Finally, getting bound, as it were, to a curious ornithological development common to the bush—a sort of damaged attorney, clumsily repaired and restored—it came to be whispered that he had married the damaged attorney's daughter. These were mere vapours that floated out of the district of the dismal swamp, absolutely intangible, which no man could grasp in his hand, and so might have been inventions of those enemies who grudged to Frederick Maxwell, Esq., and to the lady of Frederick Maxwell, Esq., that weight of power and influence to which they afterwards attained.

The damaged attorney, whose fingers were much stained and soiled with paddling in nasty waters, had been a flashy, pinchbeck man, and had a flashy, gaudy daughter, who was, as it were, a sign for his house-of-call. There he gave flashy, gorgeous dinners, and with his stained fingers gave a sort of forced and hearty

welcome to favourite comers. Mr. Maxwell was one of these ; with the cunning of the serpent in the committee-room, but with the helplessness of infancy in his domestic life, he, indeed, fancied this young person, and was rather dazzled, as are contemplative men, by the general garishness of the effect. The details do not affect this story, so need not be dwelt on with particularity here. In some way it came about. At last it came round, that Mr. Maxwell—not yet Q.C.—took with him to the altar the lovely and accomplished, &c., &c., according to the formula. A very unsuitable match, as indeed he half suspected ; and he, with a sort of relief, now that it was off his mind, went to his Year-books, while “the lady of Frederick Maxwell, Esq.,” went back to her milliners, who were a dozen strong.

These ex-flashy women, and old gentlemen’s “fine women, egad !” are costly things in their kind. The damaged attorney’s daughter was no exception. She rioted among fineries, and raged wantonly among silks and laces, and the general splendour of wearing apparel. Before half-a-dozen years were out, Frederick Maxwell, Esq., that rising barrister, was awakened up one morning from third Carrington and Payne, and second Clarke and Fenelly, by the presentation of Madame Delphine’s little account, which, for silkeries and general gauzy gear, stretched to a frightful extent.

Wonderful, how the mere decoration of this clay tenement can reach to so much. F. Maxwell, Esq., might have purchased a compact estate for the money, and turned all the laces and ribbons into good substantial land. Moneys which the rising barrister had been coining surely and steadily, all sank into the millinery

morass, and were swallowed up. Madame Delphine was easy, and even good-natured; took bills and paper generally for what could not be so readily furnished; and, what was really more indulgent still, allowed the flow of articles to stream on simultaneously. But, in five or six years more the stream got choked and dammed up again. Madame Delphine of a sudden lost her soft and engaging manner, and became stern, hard, and almost ferocious; and Frederick Maxwell, Esq., again found that another small estate might have been purchased with the silks. This time he was helpless. By desperate efforts, and heavy mortgage for many years to come of brain, time, health—everything, some arrangement was effected. But from that their life was altered. Mrs. Frederick Maxwell must cease to be flashy at such cost; and had even some glimmering of sense to see the folly of such a course. Before this time, too, the damaged attorney, stepping carefully, and picking his steps across the Chatmoss of dark money transactions, had tripped and been smothered in a bog-hole, whence, long afterwards, exhaled gases of imposture or cheating, or, as some whispered it, forgery.

All this while, too, when Frederick Maxwell, Esq., was busy with his briefs down in the well he called his study, Mrs. Frederick Maxwell wore that splendid gear for which he was responsible, at public places, and moved along, escorted by many gallant gentlemen; for these gorgeous feathers which make such gorgeous birds, must have some more direct profit in the wearing, than merely feeling them on the human figure. Of this retinue was Colonel Fondleman, Captain Freeloze, Carter Lee, and others. They walked behind her in a sort of procession.

They grouped themselves about her throne, whence she talked foolish things, and voiced the loud laugh with a rather harsh and unfeminine voice. Ancients, bewigged and bedyed, looked on from afar, and mumbled their old chant about a "something" fine woman,—which she was, if largeness, volume, and general spreading expanse of figure and dress, make up that ideal. Carter Lee was, perhaps, some paces in advance of the others, and went about to the various entertainments the "fine woman, Sir," attended, a sort of commissioned admirer—just as the Italian gentlemen do. And Mr. Frederick Maxwell, the rising counsel, stayed at home, and worked in the legal galleys, morally blind, deaf, and, perhaps, indifferent; and a good-natured fashionable public shrugged its shoulders and looked funny, and infinitely knowing, as that "fine woman, egad, Sir!" beat up the drawing-room, laboured heavily through doorways, with noisy rustling of stiff, crackling silk.

Still, these "fine women" are built of sadly perishable materials. They are showy plaster edifices, which, after much wear and tear of the elements, begin to shrink and grow awry, to peel and get smirched. Something could be done by way of temporary restoration, but not much. So, after a few years, very rapidly the "fine woman" began to fall out of repair—to collapse, decay, and crumble; the official admirers dropped away, one by one; and, what was worse, some of the inner stays and girders of the edifice began to give; and hence came that "gone" lung and "gone" liver, and very rapidly a "going" heart. Very soon the edifice was beginning to get ruined, and to be shored up by stout supports. It was all over; the noon-day of fashion was past; with it had sunk the

homage, the worship, sham or real, the professional admirers, the rustling finery. Here was invalidship and strict confinement at home. Presently, but how, soon was quite uncertain—it would be night.

The children which this estimable lady furnished to Frederick Maxwell, Esq., were eight, ten, and twelve years old. Ten and twelve were two dead-level species of girls—helpless, fat, timorous, useless, and never likely to be made much of; but eight was a boy, Jack or Jacky by name, of a very curious pattern. Not like his father, the very few people said—oh, no—who were privileged with a private view of him; not in the least like his mother, oh! dear, no, again. A strange boy and an ugly boy, with sharp, restless, travelling eyes, and a face like a nursery fire-shovel. Not by any means a boy whom charming ladies would woo over to their knees, with tender invocation, would stoop or grow rapturous over, chatter to sweetly, with head bent down. He was a kind of decent domestic city Arab, not mischievous, or getting into dirt and trouble from breakage, or smearing his cheeks, but clever, silent and wise. These three had Jenny now begun to govern. The pair of girls, below contempt in a governing sense, she found a very easy task, being poor, unintelligent souls, almost agricultural in mind; but this boy, Jack, she, somehow, did not relish from the beginning. It was hard, so young and fresh a creature as our Jenny should be set to the pilotage of such a thing. Johnny, Jenny used to say, with a deep sigh, had, some way, never taken to her from the beginning. "One of the best children in the world; a boy with a great deal of good in him, and great promise, except—except that one little fault, if fault it could be

called, of not knowing who were his friends. A cold child, a reserved child—in fact, a very curious child generally.” And Jenny sighed again, and people said, “What a task that pretty, fresh young governess must have with that loutish, maulish cub of a boy !”

It was, indeed, trying to discover a pair of sharp, prying eyes fixed upon every little proceeding our Jenny might be engaged in ; and it showed a very odd and perverse temper in the child. Sometimes, a little languid with the strain of training childish intellect, she would absently raise her eyes to a small glass, opposite which the table for the books and general work happened to be placed, and for a second would absently contemplate her own round warm coloured face, and, with a gesture almost instinctive, would smooth the outer edge of her hair, with great pains and diligence. On concluding this simple operation, it was annoying to find the ugly boy, Jacky, utterly abstracted from his “Pinnock” (Jenny always relished the simplicity of that once popular teacher, and his clear flowing method of question and answer, which left so little to the caprice of the teacher), and gazing stupidly at her face.

No less annoying was it, of a tranquil evening, when the day's labours were over for Jenny, and she was supervising their evening recreations, in a very ample and luxurious arm-chair, busy with a small foreign printed volume, whose cover was covered with white paper, to keep it from being soiled, to find this ugly child staring stupidly at the paper-covered book with a wonderful intensity. Jenny felt convinced he knew perfectly well what the character of the book was, and that if he could, he would have read it for himself. She,

indeed, was only trying, at these little spare moments, to acquire a proficiency in foreign tongues, so necessary for a poor girl that has to do battle with the world ; and had actually waited one morning on Mr. Maxwell, rousing him out of Sixth House of Lords' Cases, to ask, very modestly and timorously, if he would object to her subscribing to M. Bernardi's foreign library for German works of a historic character, as her "little charges" (so she always called them) must soon think of commencing that now necessary branch of modern education. Mr. Maxwell, with ghostly abstractions out of Sixth House of Lords' Cases still hovering between him and Jenny, grasped indistinctly that something was required for the house, said, "Yes—certainly—of course ;" and instantly, Serjeant Rooker's point bursting on him in all its splendid breath, flew back into House of Lords' Cases as though he were in a legal rabbit-warren, and became lost to the world.

And, thus privileged, Jenny improved herself in the French tongue ; the German she did not lay her mind to as yet.

M. Bernardi, whom she visited in person, was really taken with her modesty and freshness, and remarked to his French foreman something metaphorical about her being a "dish" rather "piquant et fort appétissant." And he himself, in person, made her up little square chests of all the newest things by the best French chroniclers—that is to say, by the brilliant school of M. Soulié, M. Dumas, junior, the ingenious author of "Psalambo:" and sometimes, by way of a makeweight, one of the diverting cabinet pieces of the late M. de Kock, of facetious memory. These latter, however

in the earlier days of her subscription, Jenny sent back, with a little note to "kind M. Bernardi"—a little note that actually blushed, and in which she said she could not follow M. de Kock, and did not understand him, and she was afraid—in short, would "kind M. Bernardi" send her something else? And "kind M. Bernardi," showing all his teeth, said with delight to his French foreman, that she was "coquine," and that she "intrigued" him "joliment;" to whom the French foreman rasped a few complimentary consonants. And "kind M. Bernardi" at once snapped up a bright, fresh, clean thing (outwardly, at least), in a shining pink cover, that was, twelve hours ago, on M. Amyot's counter, in the Rue de la Paix, entitled "Nuit," par Paul L'Ouregan; and "kind M. Bernardi" put up with it a rather humorous thing, by a new writer—Julie Camache—rising fast into deserved popularity, entitled "**Mon Bonnet de Nuit perdu!**"

CHAPTER IX.

JENNY'S PERSECUTION.

OF nights, then, Jenny sat—rather nestled—in her arm-chair, very tired with her day's work—one of her plump feet gathered up, very much as the gentlemen do in their easy attitudes, and improved herself in the French tongue. She made her “young charges” improve themselves also as she read, and did not allow them to romp and make a distracting noise, like ordinary ill-bred children. She kept a special watch on Master Jacky whom she *poséd* sometimes at the table, sometimes in a corner—in fact, more often in a corner. For she told him she was sorry to see in him “the seeds of a wilful and perverse temper,” which, unless they were “eradicatèd” now with a firm hand, would eventually be fatal to him, and bring him to a bad end. All which dreadful warnings he accepted placidly, and, as it appeared to Jenny, with a sort of secret contempt for her powers of forecasting the future, which indifference, not by any means outwardly expressed, did, indeed, make Jenny very sad.

Jenny, too, was very anxious about his deportment, and when she came to dull *fade* passages in the “Lost Night-cap,” would bid him hold up his hands, or hold down his hands, as the case might be; or to keep his chin up, and to “do try and learn to sit like a gentleman.” And he was so ugly, and rusted, and awkward, as it were, in his joints, he would succeed very imperfectly, and assume loutish attitudes in his attempts, being, at the same time, very

often surprised guiltily in that private staring to which Jenny had such an objection. On this she would take the trouble of actually getting up from her arm-chair and going over to him pretty briskly, jerking up his chin, and jerking down his hands with a little tartness very justifiable with such an aggravating boy. Once he told her, "You hurt me, Miss Bell, and pushed her arm away a little roughly; and Jenny, who was naturally of a fine quick temper, and with nobody present, found the temptation irresistible, and the insubordination so gross, that, with that round, fleshy hand of hers, she gave him a smart, tingling little slap across the left ear. Our pretty Jenny was carried away for the moment. Strange to say he never cried, or even looked rueful, but turned away and fell to his book again.

With the *ex-officio* invalid up stairs, he was, curious to say, the favourite of all the family. The flashy woman, now out of office, and waiting for the "heart to go," as the mediciners called it, really had a niche or corner in that poor dilapidated organ for her boy; and, it is believed, he too, regarded her reciprocally. At least, it began to be a favourite motion of his, during those evenings when Jenny was getting more than usually persevering about his deportment, to say quietly—"Miss Bell, may I go up and sit with mamma?" and Jenny, who suspected this artful boy's prodigious dutifulness, and saw, as she fancied, a spiteful twinkle in his eye, could not well refuse a willing assent—the inculcation of dutifulness being part of the governess' curriculum. Altogether, then, it may be conceived, this artful pupil did not very much gain our Jenny's affection.

But what really was at the bottom of this unhealthy

relation between mistress and pupil, was a little adventure arising out of some of M. Bernardi's books, and which indirectly brings us to Jenny's personal relation to Mrs. Maxwell, the *ex-officio* invalid up stairs, whose heart, on medical authority, was "going." These details may, perhaps, seem a little too abundant; but, as this is a sort of cabinet picture and Dutch family piece, they become almost essential.

Not very long after the visit of the Reverend Mr. Wells this very painful little incident had occurred:—One evening, about four o'clock, Mrs. Maxwell, now growing very querulous, and to be soothed *in omnibus* by medical direction—for as the chief mediciner remarked, "Our life hangs upon a mere thread"—sends down for an amusing book, with pictures, of which line of article the house is sadly destitute. An amusing book, "with pictures," and Frederick Maxwell, Esq., Q.C., in conjunction, did seem a comic possibility. There was, indeed, a sort of ancient, old-fashioned collection, which Mr. Maxwell's grandmamma had read out of and thought entertaining—novels such as "The Hermit," "The Recluse"—each in three little volumes, Robertson's "Charles the Fifth," the late Mr. Arthur Young's works, and such matter. There were also a few old-fashioned French works.

But that Mr. Maxwell should be applied to for store of entertaining illustrated books was really entertaining. "Tenth Vesey, Junior," gorgeously illustrated by Tony Johannot, would be about as droll a concatenation. Jenny is very eager about it, and distracted almost in her eagerness, and at last thinks of a sort of landscape annual, which one of the girls had been looking over the night

before on the sofa. She therefore bids Jack go up and fetch it—he will find it on the sofa. Jack, who, but that he was commissioned from above, would not have been despatched on this duty, goes up stairs. About a minute after a sudden idea flashes on Jenny, and jumping up, she flew to the drawing-room, ran to the sofa and turned back the cushion. Something she had placed there was gone. Our Jenny's full round cheek turned pale, and her round foot, much regarded and commended as she picked her way through the streets, stamped upon the ground. In another instant she crept up stairs softly. But the bed-room door was shut, and she was not privileged, she knew well, to go in.

In about a quarter of an hour the maid came down and said that, please, Mrs. Maxwell wanted to see Miss Bell, please; and our Jenny thanked the maid sweetly for the trouble she had taken, and tripped up stairs at once.

“Look here,” said the invalid, a little excitedly; “look at this, please. These are nice studies for one of his age!” and she held over to Jenny a thin octavo, bound in green mottled calf, and which was open at an engraving. Jenny took it, turned it over with wonder, and as she read the name, manifested a sense of sincerest horror. It nearly fell from her fingers. It was a work called “The Adventures of the Chevalier Faublas,” by the late M. Louvet, a persecuted Girondin, and was prettily illustrated with charming etchings, done with the old marvellous French delicacy, which quality, it must be confessed, confined itself mainly to the engraver's touch;—what would be called an “Edition of Luxury”—perhaps rather too much luxury on the whole.

It is to be feared the Chevalier had been reposing himself behind the sofa cushion, when that stupid, bungling boy had been sent up to fetch the picture-book. Jenny put the work aside with a gentle repulsion.

"How did he get this *awful* book?" said Mrs. Maxwell, excitedly. "He says——"

"Indeed I found it behind the sofa cushion—indeed I did," said Master Jack.

Jenny turned up her gentle, trustful eyes. "Don't agitate yourself, dear Madam," said she; "don't now. You know what Sir Hervey said. Leave it to Mr. Maxwell."

"But we must have the truth. He must be telling a lie," continued the patient, getting agitated. "That dreadful book!"

"It must have been curiosity, dear Madam—mere childish curiosity. He saw it on the shelf, and saw there were prints, and all children love prints. I assure you, dear Madam, there can be no harm in it. These terrible things should have been burnt long ago, but we shall have them destroyed at once."

"But the lie—the lie," said Mrs. Maxwell. "Who hid it under the cushion? To think of a child—such dreadful wickedness in one so young."

"I didn't, mamma," said the boy, fixing his eyes, with the old stare, on Jenny.

"Oh John! John!" said Jenny, designedly, "don't—don't say any more. Don't add anything. There is no harm in what you have done beyond mere natural curiosity. Recollect what Mr. Ryder Rodgers preached so beautifully on truth. Dear Madam, I have a duty here to you—you are not to flurry yourself—Sir Hervey

said so. You must let me be free enough to say that this is too exciting for you."

"Oh," groaned the patient, "I am very ill. It's like a knife through my side. Go down—there!—both of you. Leave me."

"Go, John; do you hear?" said Jenny, sternly, yet in soft suppressed sternness, and John went. "You must let me, dear Madam," said Jenny, going over to the chimney-piece, and selecting a special medicine bottle, with accompanying wine-glass and spoon. "It is the time—every three quarters of an hour. Sir Hervey——"

"I had it only a few minutes ago. I can help myself. There, leave it down—do—go away. Oh—oh—oh—this knife!"

The expression of our Jenny's face at this moment was the very essence of universal pity and compassion, developed to the highest degree. She crept softly, first going over to pick up the polluted volume for the incrimination ordained for it.

"Where are you taking that?" said the suffering lady. "Leave it, can't you? You don't want to read it—do you?"

"No, no, no, dearest Madam," murmured Jenny, and stole out finally.

The sick woman's eyes followed her with a fierce, doubting look.

CHAPTER X.

MORE OF JENNY'S THOUGHTFULNESS.

THAT evening Mr. Maxwell heard some one tapping at his door. His finger was travelling down Clarke and Fenelly—that is, down the work of those gentlemen—in a sort of exciting chase of “a point.” The “point” was doubling like a hare—hiding here, there, in this bush and in that—over the page and over the page again, until finally, just as it was lost in a sort of thick undercover, Jenny’s tap was heard at the door. It came at a convenient moment, for the legal hare could wait conveniently, in the brushwood until he came to beat it at his leisure.

Jenny entered, timorously, as she always entered where there was one of the other sex present.

“Well?” said Mr. Maxwell, dreamily appreciating her presence, and still thinking restlessly of his legal hare. “Well, Miss Bell?”

“I am afraid, Sir,” said our Jenny, “you are busy, and that I interrupt.”

She might be perfectly sure, both that he was busy, and that she *did* interrupt, and she made as though she would retire in utter confusion.

Suddenly, Mr. Maxwell, thinking of his legal hare, and where it might be hidden, by a natural association, turned back to the committee-rooms, and Serjeant Rebutter, and to the eminent engineer whom he cross-examined, and to the encyclopædic book of engineering which Jenny had found. “Very thoughtful, indeed,” he

summed up. And thus, more abstracted from Sixth House of Lords' Cases than usual, he made an effort and said, "Well, Miss Bell, what can I do for you? Pray sit down."

Timorously Jenny sank into a chair.

"Oh, Sir," she said, "you won't think me troublesome—wasting your precious time; but—but *could* you give me a little advice? I am lonely and friendless; my position is—is—very peculiar."

A point of law, thought Mr. Maxwell, Q.C., wheeling his chair a little forward on its castors, and preparing to listen. This was more in his line.

"It is about John, Sir."

"John!" said Mr. Maxwell, disturbed. "John! Who,—what is John?"

"Jack—John, Sir," said Jenny. "Oh, I am so nervous, so agitated about him. It is a tremendous, an *awful* responsibility."

"Oh yes, of course," said he, a little wearily.

"Oh, Sir," said Jenny, "I tremble for his future. He is good; he has good intentions; he is not radically wicked; but—but——"

"Good gracious!" said Mr. Maxwell, "I did not hear of this before. Why, what has he done?"

"Ah, Sir," said Jenny, hesitatingly, "as I heard you once say to a professional person in the drawing-room, 'if we have truth in our case, we have everything.'"

On the recollection of this profound observation Mr. Maxwell grew more interested, and for the first time surveyed Jenny curiously. Again the same remark rose to his lips. "A very thoughtful act of her, indeed!" He

was becoming interested, and he at once made the room into a committee of the whole House.

"So Jack does not tell the truth, it seems?" he said.

"Oh, Sir," said Jenny, dropping her eyes, demurely, "I *know* you think this childish—trivial—laughable."

"No, no. Why so?" said Mr. Maxwell, astonished.

"You do," said Jenny; "you who are always busy with grand, with noble things—whose minutes are guineas—who have all the world rushing to you. But *you* know, Sir, how delicate is *my* situation. But why should I trouble you with these little details? The fact is, I am grieved to discover in Johnny a certain disinclination, and I would ask you, Sir, to speak with him. He will attend to *you*, Sir."

"What!" said Mr. Maxwell, "do you mean to say he does not respect what you tell him? If this be so——"

"I have tried to make him love me," said Jenny, sorrowfully; "but I am afraid—perhaps it is *my* fault; in fact, I am sure it is;—but we do not understand each other. I have not yet learned my trade;" and Jenny smiled a sad smile. "I do not think anybody will ever love me!"

Mr. Maxwell was growing interested.

"But I had no idea of this; I thought Jack—what I have seen of him—was a steady, sensible, open-hearted child; not bright, certainly, but manly and honest."

"So he is! so he is!" said Jenny, with enthusiasm. "Indeed, it may be my fault. I am not fitted to manage him. He is of a good age; naturally will have more respect for men than for a mere poor foolish woman."

"Ah," said Mr. Maxwell, "very true; he is getting on. I was just thinking now, it is time he should be sent to school. Yes, he had better be sent to school."

Jenny gave a little start. What an idea! She might have been thinking for days, poor weak woman that she was, but the strong intellect of man, how soon it resolved the difficulty. All this was to be read in bold text on Jenny's round face.

"I hope, Sir," said she, timorously, "you will forgive this intrusion on your precious time. You know I have no one else in the house, and my situation is peculiar."

"Not at all," said Mr. Maxwell; "very good of you. I hope you will always——" His mind now began to stray a little towards Sixth House of Lords' Cases. "By the way, as you found a book before, I suppose you couldn't have—oh, no! that is quite improbable."

"What, what?" said Jenny, with surprising eagerness, all the lamps in her face lighting up suddenly. "Tell me, Sir, *do* tell me, anything I can do."

"Oh no; it is absurd. It was only a volume of old reports—Salkeld. Things get so astray here, my poor head gets bewildered; some way I never *can* find anything. There, thank you, Miss Bell."

He was anxious to be back at that hare of Serjeant Rebutter's. Jenny gently glided away, but had taken a glance round, and saw how things indeed "got so astray." Shelves of the dun-coloured infantry of the law ran round the room, with their name and number blazoned on the scarlet colour of their uniform. But the ranks were all gapped and broken, as though riddled and cut ~~by~~ by a heavy fire. Some were tottering over,

leaning against their fellows, some lying flat ; all were in sad disorder. But the floor of the room was the most confused spectacle ; it being like a street broken up, with piles of books instead of paving stones and rubble—a distracting sight ; so that if a special work was wanted the seeker must take off his coat, and go down and labour like a workman. Altogether a wreck everywhere of books tumbled, scattered, lying open and shut, with strained backs and tossed leaves lying under the weight of other books ; of briefs flung open, and sprawling over other books, in disreputable attitudes. In short, the whole was as though there had been a terrific accident, and a train of reports and legal incidents had been run into, and fatally smashed, and here was the *débris* lying in heaps.

Jenny took note sadly of this confusion as she faded out into the passage, and formed a little scheme of a very delicate and almost tender character. Mr. Maxwell, hurrying back to the cover where he had left the hare, said once more, as he ran, “A thoughtful, sensible person—*very* thoughtful.” Salkeld, however, was not to be found ; no, nor Ventris. And what was worse, a precious copy of Addison—not the ingenious essayist, who in this light is not by any means precious—but a gentleman of the same name who wrote matter upon “Contracts,” between the pages of which he had thrust some notes of a “rare” case, possibly “unreported,” with valuable “dicta” of Vice-Chancellor Owlet—this, too, he wanted for the Court or Committee. In short, everything was lost or going astray, and he had to hurry away, post down to Westminster or Lincoln’s Inn, much fretted and put out.

As soon as he was gone, Jenny called her "young charges" together. "My dear girls," she said, "you are looking so pale and unhealthy, you don't walk enough. Grammar and French is pretty well in its way, but health before all. Go out now together into the fresh breezes of Burleigh Square. We will put off lessons a little."

Where the fresh breezes of Burleigh Square circulated was a sort of large yard (as to size), and a patch of unhealthy and languishing verdure. Burleigh Square itself was an infant of but one year old; in all the newness and rawness of reeking plaster, some of which had got down among the grass. "As for you," she said, smiling pleasantly at Jack, "you ought not to be allowed to go. Still, if you will try and be a good boy, and beg pardon in your prayers, we will try and pass it over. Truth, truth, my good children, should be the magnet of your existence; without it you may never hope to be either great or good. Go now, my dear children, go for your walk."

The girls went out softly, impressed with a reverential feeling. The boy followed after them more slowly. He presently stopped at the door, and fixing his curious eyes on her, said bluntly—

"You know you put the book there yourself, Miss Bell; I saw you take it down on Tuesday, and you were reading it the other night after we went to bed." He then shut the door and went down after his sisters.

Jenny's cheeks kindled at the infamous charge of the little wretch. Her eyes flashed. What spite! It would have been a wholesome correction to have gone after him, dragged him in, and made his wretched little

ears tingle. The honest nature of our Jenny—(it is no discredit to confess it)—burned to inflict that penalty on him. Poor unprotected thing ! it was unworthy—it was unequal. She with no friend's ! No one to trust to. No matter, he must be promptly sent to school, for his own good. Such a vindictive nature could be dealt with suitably only by men. So, for his own good again, must he be sent to school.

They being gone forth to the sward of Burleigh Square, Jenny flits down to Mr. Maxwell's study, and enters that sacred enclosure. What she was about was perilous—housemaids were charged under terrible penalties—hanging, forfeitures of goods, and what not—to abstain from laying even a finger on the hallowed disorder. It was consecrated ground. And yet, here was our Jenny courageously breaking in, and laying out for herself the work of charity of bringing all things into smoothness again. She pitied—she compassionated that poor overworked hodman, with the dying wife and responsibility of children, absolutely a child himself.

So she set to work with diligence and with judgment. Marvellous what a tact and instinct she had in the labour ! She seemed to hit on what books were more in request. In fact, our Jenny, whatever she laid herself to, brought with her a very nice instinct, a sort of intellectual *savoir faire* ; and was pretty sure to make no conspicuous blunder. And so she smoothed away the heavy mounds of legal earth, levelled all things, brought together the disunited family of Vesey—some twenty or so strong ; gathered together "House of Lords' Cases," which had a tendency to straggle to opposite sides of the room ; set in order the loose pamphlet Reports—

Part one, two, three, according to the series ; and, by a better device, actually stitched firmly together a bundle, whose viscera were all bursting out. Finally, she actually disinterred the lost Addison—much strained and disjointed about his back and spine, with all muscular spring gone from his binding, from being kept too long open ; and found there also the precious *dicta* of Vice-Chancellor Owlet. Nothing could be nicer or more symmetrical than the fashion in which she ranged these auxiliaries ; Vesey, Junior, went home to his shelves, and the more necessary books were ranged to the right and left on the table, in the order of their use ; while on his desk was set the recovered Addison, with the dislocations in his back skilfully “reduced,” and the precious note of Vice-Chancellor Owlet supported on the convalescent Addison. Mr. Maxwell’s ink was usually a sort of stagnant pool, and his pens utterly disorganised. The process of writing was a sad discomfort and torture. But all this “service” was now reorganised, and our Jenny, with much good-feeling, brought down pens from her room—things that would write—and set them there beside the desk. There was nothing prodigious in all this ; but, somehow, it is the fate of these helpless men ever to want these species of little helps ; and it must be said again, that it was delicate, tender, and considerate for a mere simple governess to put herself out of the way in this manner.

CHAPTER XI.

JENNY AS SECRETARY.

MR. MAXWELL did not dine at home that day—if that was dinner which consisted in snatching at a piece of meat more or less underdone, and complimentarily named “a chop,” and a glass of wine;—but when he came home at night, ruminating and “fretted”—for he had been “pressed” during the day with a “point” which Vice-Chancellor Owlet’s note would have settled—and entered his study, even his absent mind was struck by the change—the marvellous change. He could walk, the road was clear; the Fairy of Order had come down to earth. But when he saw Vice-Chancellor Owlet neatly folded on his desk, and the lost Addison, he was positively confounded. He first thought of the housemaids, who had feloniously dared to intermeddle; but when he noted the method, the legal judiciousness of the handling—the Chancery-books set all together, and “House of Lords’ Cases” well forward—he knew that here were no housemaid’s rude fingers. In fact, Frederick Maxwell, Q.C., with acute lawyer’s instinct, at once leaped to the conclusion he should have done; and said—“Really a most thoughtful act;” and repeating it again, added this—“Really a most *kind* and thoughtful act.”

At breakfast next morning he returned his acknowledgments in, perhaps, an awkward way, to the wonder of the family, who were unused to such an exhibition.

Jenny gracefully acknowledged it; and timorously said she was afraid that she had been very meddlesome.

"On the contrary, of inestimable service; I can draw breath now," said Mr. Maxwell. "I can ride—I can walk—I can find my way. So kind and considerate. I am really much obliged."

At this moment Jenny noted Jack's eyes again fixed on her, with the old strange expression. She coloured, and one side of her nice, full cheek went down with a sort of ghost of a contortion.

Just at that moment, too, Mr. Maxwell's eyes fell upon Jack, and by natural association he thought of what Jenny had spoken yesterday touching his going to school. The equities of the case, as he would call it, required that this should be adjusted, and a person in her depending position, so "thoughtful, so kind, and so truly considerate—a really invaluable person" to have in a house, should not be made uncomfortable. So, on the first opportunity, he went to see Mrs. Maxwell, to speak about Jack's removal to school.

Jack was sitting with her, reading, which was a popular duty with him. It has been said he was the favourite, if there was any, of the sick ex-fashionable woman—at least, she tolerated him more than the rest. This poor soul, with her warrant already in the sheriff's hand, was, of course, busy doing what cleansing and burnishing she could compass with her poor, soiled, fashionable old soul. The book in Jack's hands was, of course, the suitable book for the occasion. It was a lively thing, called "Willis's Rooms," in three volumes—quite new, and said to be written by Lady Mantower's second daughter.

Jack was sent out with his book. The ex-fashionable lady—very wan and attenuated, and every day gradually assuming that pale lead tint which is the precursor of the great change, and was thrown out in a curious relief by the white linen—wondered at this unexpected visit.

Mr. Maxwell opened his subject timorously. Somehow, he felt there would be opposition. So there was. The sick lady's eyes flashed up, the cords in her wasted throat quivered.

"He shall not go," she said, tremulously. "I know very well who wants to get him out of the house!—I know."

Mr. Maxwell recollected the doctor's injunction and grew nervous, as he saw her agitation. He tried to calm her.

"You know, it is for his good," he said. "But don't agitate yourself now; we will talk of it again."

"But we shall *not*," said the sick lady, "so long as I lie in this bed! You think because you keep me shut up here in this room that I don't know what is going on. But I tell you who shall go; she takes too much on herself, I can tell you. She——"

"There—there," said he, seriously; "everything shall be as you wish. He shall not go. There; you know you are not to disturb yourself. I merely thought, as he was getting so big; but there now, we shan't speak of it. Of course this is your house, and you are mistress." And so he went down, wondering at the perverseness of sick people, and at the strange distorted views they take of things. That Miss Bell, who was so obliging, so thoughtful—so anxious to please all in the house;—such a ludicrously perverted view to take of *her*!

While the sick Mrs. Maxwell—her heart thumping with the oscillations of a steam-engine—sank back, not without a certain glow of pride over her cheek. She was still mistress, and acknowledged as such ; and presently the rescued Jack was sent for again, and recommenced reading, in his accustomed drone, the select views of life set out in “Willis’s Rooms.” She presently told him the whole story. “They wanted to pack you off to a large school, Jacky,” she said. “You have to thank your friend, Miss What’s-her-name, for that. She is not strong enough as yet for *that*. I shall take care of you, Jacky, never fear. And you keep your eye on her. I shall live longer than they think.” Which facts Jack took in steadily, much as he drank his tea of mornings—with a slow, measured suction. He only answered, “Yes, mamma.” Very shortly after, she began to grow sleepy, even in presence of Lady Mantower’s younger daughter, and was nodding. Jacky’s duty was then over, and he crept away softly. Coming down, he stood in the drawing-room doorway, where Jenny was working, and said, in his stolid way, “Miss Bell, I’m *not* to be sent to school,” then disappeared.

It was singular, indeed, the morbid feeling with which the poor sick lady had begun to regard Jenny—the more extraordinary, too, as that young creature spared no pains, either of dutiful attendance or of delicate little soothing ways to win her over. The grimness of sickness or mere natural perverseness stood in the way.

It is certain it grew and gathered strength ; and the sick lady grew pettishly curious about her and her movements, and magnified what were mere breaths and vapours into thick heavy clouds. It took the shape of

a sort of intolerance—a sort of curious secret jealousy, utterly unaccountable.

It must be said, in justice to our Jenny, never was there a more gracious indulgence to a sick woman's humour, or a more kindly allowance. One of another mould would have promptly resigned her place, and gone out from among them. But she felt how cruel would be such a step to so disordered a maniac, and how helpless she would leave all behind. What, indeed, upheld her, too, was the silent support extended to her by the lord of the mansion, wonderfully developed for one of his indifference to the world's ways—that is, the world outside the Committee—and which she acknowledged with silent gratitude. That this feeling on his part was daily strengthened may be well conceived, for it was brought home to him in many silent ways. What effectually established her in his respect and esteem, akin almost to the feeling with which he would regard Serjeant Rebutter, were some little incidents which shall now be detailed.

Being overworked—like the case of many overworked men—Mr. Maxwell began to break down in the eyes. These precious darling auxiliaries, so worked, so driven, so galled, and so cruelly treated, and who yet work until they drop, as it were—these precious things he found giving way. There were first clouds and floating specks—the usual forerunners; then swimming and rawness, and general sensitiveness to night light. Still there was a fitfulness—one day mending, another growing worse. Besides, the work *must* be got through—some injunction to move or oppose—and it is wonderful how this feeling supplies physical defects. It carried

Mr. Maxwell through, just as air does a fire. Distracted people do feats of strength, and take wonderful jumps, which confound them as they think of it afterwards. But, finally, Mr. Maxwell's eyes, now grown very hot and strained, came to closing up feebly as lights were brought, and could do very little work at all at night.

Of course, he went to Bradshaw, the eminent oculist, who got him into a dark room, and made a servant hold a taper, while he, Bradshaw, stared with a wonderful magnifier right into the ball of Mr. Maxwell's eyes. The verdict was, "Chronic weakness, my dear Sir; the vascular tissues all overcharged with blood; inflammation, my dear Sir," with other particulars. There was also another "finding"—cessation from all night work; with which comfort Mr. Maxwell went away; and with, also, a lotion.

This was terrible news for him. Even that very night there was work not to be postponed. An opinion set out in his own pale handwriting, was about as illegible as a chart of the nervous system. Nobody had the knack of deciphering these signs—not even his own clerk, for they varied with every day; and he had no special character in his writing. His heart really sank at the prospect, for his legal occupation was to him food, meat, drink—life itself. The motion in this action was suspended. It was as though he were hurrying to decay.

Who in the house had marked his trouble so well as our "thoughtful" Jenny. She had noted even the first pale pinkness of those orbs, before it had been announced officially, as it were. Hers were the steady inquiries of

the morning; hers the gentle proffer of home-made lotions, not stamped *ex cathedra*, yet meant very well; hers, too, were the gentlest and most timorous remonstrances, hoping that he would excuse the freedom, &c., but that sue knew the danger from fatal family experience; and her own darling mother, from an over enthusiasm for the labours of the needle, having brought on, &c. (Who was Jenny's mamma, or was this ardour for sempstress work something more than merely amateur?) She would timorously implore him—if not too great a liberty—for the sake of his darling ones, to be a little discreet.

But that night, when the "opinion" was required, our Jenny showed her thoughtfulness in a yet more practical way. She first said to Jack, "Go up to your dear mamma, John: dear" (she never could bring herself to adopt the vulgarity of "Jacky"), "and sit with her." Then she set some picture-books before the girls, and tripped away down stairs.

Below in his study, just beginning to try and copy out his "opinion," he found that it would not do. A sharp pain, an inexpressible sinking, as though his eyes were sinking away inwardly. It would not do, and he looked up blankly. Just then our Jenny tapped ever so softly at the door, as she always did, and entered.

It was on another "thoughtful" mission. Would he allow her to help? Would he take her for his scribe? She was very patient, very industrious, would try and do her best; and besides this (she added a little timorously), *thought* she knew his hand pretty well. Might she, at least, make the attempt?—she could only fail.

It was an enormous relief. Yet Mr. Maxwell could

not believe, and shook his head sadly. Woman at this sort of work? No! no! She translated his thought for him at once. "You think, Sir," she said, "because I have not been trained—because I am not a man. I know we are poor feeble creatures; but, Sir, we sometimes *do* our best."

Mr. Maxwell shook his head, but less positively. He did not believe yet, but still he was pleased. He rubbed his hands across his poor, weak eyes. That, again was another argument. "Well," he said with a smile, "we can only try. It is very charitable," he added with a dreamy air, being scarcely yet out of the Committee-room; "and very thoughtful, indeed. Would you sit down, then, here?"

He drew a chair over, shovelled away some of the heavy legal mould upon the table, to make a clear space and set the "opinion" before her, marked with all the straggling lines of the nervous system. But Jenny, whose innate ideas of delicacy were wonderful, hesitated a little. It was now gone ten o'clock. There was an awkwardness, in short, Sir. Perhaps he would not have any objection, if one of the girls were to come down?

The girls come down! And he gazed at her in bewilderment. They could not write. Jenny, much embarrassed, was hanging her head. This dull parliament man could not see it, until Jenny tripped away in confusion, and presently brought down "one of the girls," who was amazed at the new function put upon her, and sat in a corner with a heavy book on her knee—"Gilbert on Uses," I believe—which Jenny in a sort of absent way had put into her hands.

There was the new secretary, with Mr. Maxwell now

walking about, now standing over her for a moment. Jenny had taken the roll of cuneiform inscriptions, and was laboriously yet surely working it out in her own clear hand. He dictated alterations. New legal lights broke in on him. It was wonderful—extraordinary—the strange legal Argot and all. He was confounded, and stood beside her, following her flowing pen with wonder.

But Jenny was very intelligent. She really was acquainted with that barristerial hand. She was very familiar with Mr. Maxwell's—a familiarity no doubt acquired while she set his room in order. Nay, as for this very document itself—but this is pure speculation.

Speedily, intelligently, she did the work — the "opinion" spread out neatly over the page. For a word here and there she paused, looking up timorously to her director. It came to eleven. The child who was supporting "Gilbert on Uses" on her knee, dropped off to sleep, and suffered that defunct Lord Chief Baron (for that was the quality of the late Gilbert) to slip to the ground, with loud noise. Both looked round.

"Poor child," said Jenny, with deep sympathy, "she has been kept up beyond her usual hour; poor, poor child."

Mr. Maxwell came into the world again. "Poor child," he said also—it was doubtful to whom he applied it. "I am afraid I have been very selfish. This, I suppose, must do for to-night!" And he drew a deep sigh, for he thought of the welcome vigils he so loved, when at an hour or two past midnight he took his way up stairs, weary, yet with a grateful weariness.

"I am not tired," said Jenny. "I can write on for two hours to come. We must finish this to-night."

"But this child," said he, looking over at her who had dropped the Lord Chief Baron.

"To be sure! *She* can go," said Jenny, in a flutter.

The girl, with weary eyes, stood up gladly.

"Go to bed," said her father; "you must not be kept up any longer."

"But," said Jenny, timorously, "I am afraid the opinion cannot be done to-night. *I* could not——"

"What!" said Mr. Maxwell, almost despairingly. "You will not leave me! It *must* be done by to-morrow morning."

The girl had fled away to her bed, leaving the Lord Chief Baron where he was, on the ground.

"I must have it by the morning," said Mr. Maxwell. "Oh, could you be so kind? You have been of such aid to me, I never can sufficiently acknowledge."

Jenny had wonderful sense. She had the rare instinct for seizing the situation, where scruples would be in-pertinent, and should give way. She thought of this poor, hard-working man-of-burden, and his trouble; his wistful look, and his great sorrow, and the huge responsibility that rested on him. And was she, by childish humours and delicacies, to stand in the way?

Without a word more, she sat down again, took up her pen, and wrote on. In nearly two hours' time the whole was finished—a neat specimen of penmanship; and when the last word was written, fled away, without waiting for the grateful thanks of her master. As he looked over her labour he grew very thoughtful. It was a Samaritan's work,—no wonder he was grateful; and as

the hall clock was striking three, he passed up stairs, still ruminant and thoughtful.

Jenny that night before retiring to bed, took out her little "Letts' Diary." She wrote in it something that must have been pleasing, for she smiled as she wrote. Sometimes, as she ruminated, words would escape her, for she was of an enthusiastic temper; and she really did murmur the name of a dear old friend, not seen now for a long time. "Charlotte" was the name she murmured; thinking, no doubt, of the old time, and the sweet pastoral breath of the country, contrasted with her present servitude. She turned back to another diary, to a special month, and found out the record of the last days of her stay at the Franklyns'; where, too, was that name of Charlotte Franklyn, with the cross X before it, and this she considered a long time very carefully. Sweet bygone times. She was not likely to forget them.

There was a letter all this time on her dressing-table, which, strange to say, she had never noted—a letter with the Franklyn post-mark. She opened it eagerly. This was our curate's letter—our distracted curate's letter—of which mention has been made, and a portion of which, as it were, read to the reader. This journal of the doings down there, and the pleasant little gossip anent dearest Charlotte, dearest Jenny's friend, the coming of young Craven, and the pleasant family rallying on that subject.

Jenny was solitary—so there was no one to mark or be astonished at her reception of this welcome bit of news; but as she stood there, in a dim light, in a white dressing-gown, hair cast down, and universal *déshabille*, did she not suggest the notion of a sort of domestic

Medea? And before she lay down to her soft, untroubled rest, she wrote a letter to dear Mr. Wells — an affectionate, grateful letter—thanking him, oh! so profoundly, for his consideration for “the poor little exile;” such was the pretty name she had devised for herself.

She was longing, yearning, to learn more about her dear friend Charlotte; would it be too much to ask her friend—and she might, she thought, call him her friend—her friend, then, Mr. Wells to furnish her with any additional particulars, and as speedily as possible. Might she rely on him?

CHAPTER XII.

THE DUNMOW PETITION.

BUT presently Jenny was to assist at far more important business. About a fortnight later, when his sight had mended a little by rest, some large white bales of what looked like linen—thick, ponderous, and unwieldy—were brought in. They were fresh and fragrant, and their style and titles were marked in bright characters outside. In short, the Great Dunmow Election Petition, after fluttering in all the uncertain balance of treaty, argument, feeble compromise, and even a little corruption, was now finally to go forward. The Hon. Noel Bashford, the sitting member, would defend his seat to the death; and Coxe,—Samuel Cox, Esq., a local man of business—all efforts at amicable adjustment failing, was determined, according to the local paper, “to wrest the constituency from the corrupt fangs of the

Bashfords." The Bashfords were little known in the borough ; and it was said that frightful scenes of corruption had occurred during the days of the election. The Honourable Noel had money—Coxe had only principle. What was called "unblushing" bribery had taken place. On the Hon. Noel's side, public-houses had been purchased up wholesale, and the land made to flow mysteriously, with beer and other drinks. Magic dinners were spread, at which those who entertained friendly feelings towards the Hon. Noel might sit and feast gratuitously. It was even said that two conscientious voters had been carried away and kept locked up in an old mill during the period they should have been exercising the privileges which a free country gave them. Altogether it was felt that the grand "constitutional badge of freedom" had been scandalously outraged ; and rich and abundant details were looked for. The files of counsel drawn up on each side were crowded. For the sitting member, Mr. Serjeant Rashley, Mr. Touchstone Shepherd, Q.C., Mr. Martin Welles, Q.C., and Mr. Folkstone and Mr. Prong. For the petitioner, Mr. Ghetwood Smith, Q.C., Mr. Maxwell, Q.C., Serjeant Bendyer, and the great counsel, Mr. Edwin Bowles, Q.C., every minute of whose time weighed down a golden guinea in the other scale.

Retainers in proportion. Sums that made one gasp were "on" each brief, conveying the pleasant notion of Eastern ways : a huge purse of gold possibly being inserted between the red tape and the snowy paper. Sixty witnesses for the petitioner were already in London, living at suitable hotels, according to their degree, but under fierce espionage. A

large committee-room had been set apart for the inquiry.

The petitioners congratulated themselves a hundred times in the day on having secured the services of Edwin Bowles, Q.C. The people of the sitting member, who were only late by some twenty minutes, had a corresponding gloom over them, and went into the battle with a sort of foreboding of defeat. Edwin Bowles had already made the petitioner and his following this encouraging declaration: "I don't undertake to seat you, but I will engage to unseat *him*." Joy mantled in all their faces, and they became eager for the fray. Yet it was hard to conceive how this man could bring such valuable assistance to the side he chose to favour. His was a coarse, sensual face, surmounting a gross figure "run" in the most animal of all the British "moulds" kept in stock: a man, too, whose manners and morals were known to correspond with these faithful outside marks and tokens: who was said to be a sort of legal Sybarite; who merely flung his fees from one hand as fast as he received them in the other: who was seen at the Isthmian games, and at the haunts where sham judges and juries play out degrading copies of trials, over whiskies and strong drinks; who loved the company of Phryne and Lais quite as well as that of Themis; who was engulfed up to his thick throat in a miry pool of debts and embarrassments; and over whose golden gains an official person was said to keep careful watch,—representing a whole guild of creditors. This was the gay, boisterous skilful practitioner who was friend to young Lord Splashley, and young Sir Thomas Baker, Grenadier Guards; who met those youths in cheerful private

festivals, and fascinated them by a certain hearty jovial *nisi prius* :—a fascination that resulted in misty money transactions that were to be “impeached,” long after. Happy, then, in the learning of Edwin Bowles, Q.C., the petitioners prepared for battle.

Mr. Maxwell caught some of the excitement of the coming fray, and trained himself with ardour. Happy for him, he had found an assistant in time. That first night, he unpacked the snowy bales with care and delicacy, and showed their beauties to Jenny. The mixture of corrupt humanity—the publicans, ostlers, beer boys, porters, and general broken-down auxiliaries—whose speeches and observations (some precious as the golden guineas which the other side indeed insinuated had purchased them) were here chronicled, was truly edifying. The fresh scent of the new crisp—to the barristerial nose more fragrant than that of new-mown hay—was overborne by the fumes of unfinished quart pots, of straw, and of the faint air of stables, which by association seemed to exhale from the entries. But being “briefed” to Mr. Maxwell, they all fell into one common mould. His mind saw but so many men in the ranks. There were conversations at inn-yard corners, in the back room of the public-house, on the railway platform—in which a mysterious being, called “Budge,” always figured,—a sort of election tempter, who tampered with all men; and there was a butcher—a remarkable man, who seemed to have been the very incarnation of bribery.

Jenny presently knew the whole history : about Budge; about the publicans, ostlers, porters and the remarkable butcher. This election element has more of the dramatic

than other shapes of legal proceedings. It is more irregular, and to lay minds more comprehensible. The lawyers fling away their armour, and fight more in the guerilla fashion. Jenny read it all, and seemed to be amused by it. Mr. Maxwell was much pleased that she was amused by his commentaries and explanations. Jenny was exceedingly sensible, and as she was to carry out a task or duty, tried to lighten by getting an interest in it.

In a few days, Mr. Tandy, of the great parliamentary firm of Bellarmine and Tandy, Old George Street, Westminster, came to wait on Mr. Maxwell, in reference to a consultation or some such arrangement,—a dry, quick man, that seemed to emit sparkles, and who would have to live in action for many weeks to come. Rooms had been taken close to the Houses, where Bellarmine and Tandy might keep a sort of depôt, and have their forces in reserve.

Jenny took interest in these preparations; and Mr. Maxwell was much flattered by her questions. "Ah! Sir," said she, thoughtfully, one evening, "there shall come a day when you shall fill another office, and have counsel employed for you. I have often thought how you should be in parliament. There is that Mr. Holyoake, whom you often told me of, doing very little, I think, Sir, you said, at the Equity bar——"

"I suppose not making eight hundred a year," said Mr. Maxwell.

"Oh, Sir!" said she, with sudden enthusiasm, "you *must* be in parliament; you are tending to it. I see it. I am sure—I am confident I shall see you elected *very, very* shortly."

Mr. Maxwell was charmed with this honest warmth.

More delighted still was he with the allusion to Holyoke, which showed that she knew the inner details of the profession and recollected what he told her.

At last the committee was struck; Mr. Tartar Gibton, the well-known member for Staleybridge, the chairman. The day was named and the case opened. Jenny wished, with delightful simplicity, that she could go down to the House and look on at the proceedings.

It excited extraordinary interest. The large committee-room was always thronged. From the door barely a glimpse was to be obtained of the committee sitting calmly afar off, and fenced carefully from the crowd. There was Mr. Gibton—a quiet man in a yellow waistcoat—steady, attentive, and keeping all things straight. There were the other members of the committee—moustachioe, young Lord Buckstone, Mr. Wells, Captain Bouchier, Mr. Finucane, the member for Avoca, who were very absorbed and diligent the first day, and took profuse notes; who all gradually fell off into distraction, and wrote and sent away a good many letters on private business.

There were the shorthand writers of the House, racing along at express speed; there were the parliamentary agents; there were the counsel, whose heads seemed like a row of pianoforte dampers, “buffed” with wigs instead of felt, who shot up and down with all the jerking motion of those harmonious appliances. The long row was awe-inspiring—even terrible; when they fell to battle, and contended fiercely over the person of a witness.

It was full of dramatic incident, duly reported by Mr. Maxwell, coming home flushed and excited when the

day was done—photographed, as it were, for Jenny, who hung suspended on his accents. She knew them all, the actors and incidents, from the butcher downwards. But the grand feature was when the butcher had to be put in the chair for examination, who could not decently be kept back, and when, at the close of his testimony, the committee adjourned. It was known that the next day this dangerous butcher would be engaged in person by Edwin Bowles, Q.C., by way of cross examination, who had kept himself expressly in reserve for this stage of the fight.

Such a crowd, and such packing close and squeezing of the human form. Every one's face overlooked every one's shoulder. There were smiles, tittering, and loud laughter, even applause, until the chairman, Mr. Gibton, threatened to have the room cleared. It was protracted through the whole day. The butcher,—a truculent, greasy being, more inclining to the horse and prize-fighting direction than to the harmless titular calling he professed—displayed matchless coolness, tact, and effrontery. Edwin Bowles closed with him many times, but was flung back without giving him a fall. Butcher calm and defiant; butcher at times dealing Edwin Bowles a skilful sidestroke, which raised much merriment and delight. But it was this that eventually undid him. He became jocular and insolent from security. Edwin Bowles, calm, and waiting patiently for hours, at last saw the opening, rushed in, and flung him. Butcher was cowed, faltered, contradicted himself, became hot, surly, and confused, and finally had the truth wrung from him. When the committee rose, Edwin Bowles sat down, heated, weary, but triumphant; and was felt by all in the room—there were

some creditors present, too, struggling between a sense of pecuniary injury and admiration—to be unsurpassed in England as a cross-examiner. That night the Hon. Noel Bashford felt himself half slipping out of his parliamentary chair.

For ten, fifteen days, it was protracted—days inexpressibly sweet to all—to *nearly* all concerned—sweet to the barristerial agriculturist, who, with their legal sickles, reaped the high standing corn of fees. The merest fledgling, who indeed sat diligently, and made one of the rank and file, but never spoke, could not labour without being “instructed” and “refreshed” to the song of fifteen guineas. For his six counsel, then, the Hon. Noel was disbursing about one hundred guineas daily—and even for this outlay he could not secure their services. Mr. Touchstone Shepherd, Q.C., was “in” two other “heavy” petitions, and at best could only come rushing in spasmodically to aid his client’s interest for ten minutes or so, and sometimes, out of pure decency, examined a “short” witness—not in stature, but whose evidence could be comprised within half an hour; and sometimes with much heat entered into an altercation with opposing counsel, to show that he was earnest and awake. So was it with Martin Welles, who rushed in and out also, sat uneasily for a few minutes, did a good deal of nodding and whispering, possibly examined another “short” witness, and then hurried away. But faithful and constant were the minor fledglings, who, unemployed in other cases, sat there without stirring.

Sweet, pleasant days for the agents parliamentary. With them everything was grand, lavish, luxurious. A whole corps of shorthand writers, of copyists, were busy

half the night with the day's evidence, so that every morning with the rolls and coffee, each of the six counsel had his copy, bright, clean, and new upon his table. Two-pence per sheet or "folio" this cost the agent parliamentary, but the agent parliamentary, in his "costs" to the Hon. Noel, set each folio down at eightpence. Say three hundred and fifty folios for the day's work, and seven copies of three hundred and fifty folios, and there will be a total in this mere mechanical direction of say fifty or sixty pounds' outlay for each day.

More happy, however, were Binns and Barker, agents to the Huge Leviathan Railway Company, that meanders over half England, and who "come in" gigantically before a committee with—say fifteen counsel—for whom there must be fifteen copies of evidence, written out at a daily charge of a hundred and forty pounds or so. These are indeed the happy hunting-grounds of solicitors.

For twelve days the battle raged. Edwin Bowles performed prodigies. He was very often present. He bore down everything in a telling speech, mangling and scarifying the butcher in a way one of his profession was never dealt with before. He was vigorous, humorous, forcible, and sarcastic to a degree; wonderful in one who had been up till dawn at a "mess," absorbed in chicken hazard; wonderful, too, in one who had signed some heavy notes of hand, that would absorb the rich fee harvests he had been getting in these few days back.

The committee deliberated for two hours and a half, and found according to the usual form.

1°. That the Hon. Noel Bashford was not duly elected to serve in the present parliament, &c.

2°. That the Hon. Noel Bashford had, by his agents, been guilty of treating, bribery, &c.

3°. That there does not appear to be sufficient evidence to connect the Hon. Noel Bashford, &c., according to the usual form.

Grand jubilee—almost osculation of Edwin Bowles. The battle had been fought and won. Every one in the ranks—specially the youngest lawyer engaged—considered that he had ministered to the happy result. Mr. Maxwell came home triumphant, and, to the prejudice of his regular, talked it all over with Miss Bell, for three or four hours at least. The day was celebrated by champagne. Miss Bell was absorbed by the details. She heard Edwin Bowles's speech all through, at secondhand. She heard how the committee looked—how it was doubtful at one time—how a member, called Bouchier, was long obstinate—how he gave way at last. In everything Jenny was absorbed. She delighted in it all, even to a dry point of law, which Mr. Maxwell, encouraged by the fascination the subject seemed to exercise over her, was tempted into opening: and so got down the Text Books and Reports, and went into it regularly. She said it was like a story-book, the point of law.

It was past one o'clock that night before he had finished with the engrossing theme.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW GUEST.

Down at the Franklyns' there was a certain tempered excitement—now unhappily but little usual with that family—consequent upon the arrival of the guest. Young Welbore Craven had come, had been established in the chamber garnished and set out for him, and was making his company very welcome to all.

He was a tall, brave, bright, open creature ; with a fair face, and cheeks almost of a delicate pink. On this ground, a light yellow moustache bloomed efflorescent. He was broad-chested—yet not of rough animal proportions ; could walk a mountain, fly a gate of many bars, step deftly over a bog ; in short, had graduated with distinction in the Grand University whose curriculum lies in field sports and open-air exercise. But he had no special inner gifts, beyond a fund of tranquil good-humour—always “on,” as it were—not made to play on special and distinguished occasions, just as some men keep the *grands eaux* for festivals. This made him always welcome in every house, and more than supplied the want of those little cascades and devices which others exhibit. And in his absence was often heard the gratifying ejaculation delivered from female lips, “Oh ! I do *so* like Mr. Craven.” The being the child of his father, and destined to bear a Red Hand upon his sleeve, was, as it were, a sort of prism held between him and his virtues. It was wonderful *how* gorgeous was the refraction. The tints were multiplied prodigiously—possibly, it will be said, wholly

supplied by that medium. But no ; were he yet unfranchised, and walking through the world clanking the chains and fetters of a younger son, he would still have found a welcome. He would not indeed be coveted ; but entering into another category, he would be looked on with favour, and allowed to pass in with a smile at the gate of country houses. The strict exclusives are not so wholly strict in this regard. Crowns and quarterings, acres and purses, are not the sole passwords. The natural qualities—provided all dross of vulgarity be skimmed away—of freshness, geniality, good nature, have a magnetic charm of their own. So with young Welbore Craven.

They were very pleasant down at the Franklyns'. They disported together like children. The younger girls enjoyed it prodigiously, the more perhaps, because there had been universal fast of late from all such things. These pastimes were, perhaps, scarcely of the grave or dignified order suited to the ages of the persons engaged. There was a wild reckless freedom, and a rare physical development about them, perhaps more suited to the school and to the age of school-time.

But they were all born in the country—reared in the country—and, as seems to be the case in such instances, had never found their taste for the whole round of country associations—green fields, green trees, the running water, and the rest—grow enfeebled by satiety. Trite, but very true, is the remark, that it is impossible to read through the grand green book of nature. We never tire of turning over its gorgeously coloured prints, and fresh bright stories.

There was a lake close by the house of the Franklyns, with a little pier down to the water, and a goodly sized

boat. The Franklyn young ladies loved the water, and when they were alone would come down chattering and laughing, of mornings and evenings, and pull the oars with good skill and fair strength. Young Welbore Craven, now on this visit, would come down with them often, and they would put off together, a noisy joyous party—not indeed with any pure love of oarmanship, for little was done in that direction, but from the sheer “fun of the thing ;” for the boat moved but lazily ; and there was splashing and rocking from side to side, and entanglement of oars, and fictitious perils, and general confusion, to a loud cheerful chorus of unchecked laughter and general frolic. The elder sister, who must not be taken to be too demure in her temper, and in her quiet way loved their droll exercises too, attended, as it were, by way of general moderator. That strangely youthful young man of business had a sort of leaning to attach himself to these parties,—an odd fancy, for no one *could* be so utterly and hopelessly out of place. Yet for the young to consort with the young, what more natural ? Yet it may not be concealed that his company was by no means relished. He was a living inconsistency—an anachronism among their sports. As discordant as the ideas of contingent remainders and a ball-room, a Hebrew root and a wedding, yet with that curious misapprehension of the ends for which he was created, a strange fatality seemed to draw him to the young. He, too, went in the boat, and did splashing according to the infantine laws and canons.

Young Welbore Craven did not relish him from the first. He made no secret of it. His fair open face would contract when he saw the young man of business approaching with light gay steps. “ Why is this odious attorney

always teasing us in this way? Can't he stick to his law and bill of costs? We don't want him." And presently he had christened him (with a loud boisterous laugh) "Young Capias," and the girls welcomed that sobriquet with delight, and by the name of "Young Capias" he was invariably known among them for the future.

He was considered horribly intrusive, and was always introducing himself with a pleasant boyish *déagé* air into their amusements. He was agreeably free and easy with Miss Charlotte, who, strange to say, would appear to have accepted him on much the same footing. A blank would fall on the whole party when, some little congress of amusement being arranged, the young man of business was seen tripping from the house, in a jaunty lounging fashion, to join their sports. A plot of smooth-shaven grass had been marked out, decorated with poles and flags, all for the now popular game of croquet; with deft delicate touches, the blue, green, and black balls were all day long spinning along over the grass, and the sharp smart click of the spiteful roquet was heard through the air like dropping musketry. An uncharitable game—a malicious exercise, more or less vindictive, mainly on account of that roquet element. It scarcely evokes the charities of society. He whose green or yellow ball lies within a stroke of victory, but which is savagely shot away across a whole prairie into the remote desert, strikes the ground savagely with this implement, and turns away to hide an impatient smile of vexation.

Young Craven and Miss Charlotte usually played the field—the whole world, in fact. The sides were about evenly matched. They could not then relish the adhesion of the jaunty young man of business when he came

tripping forth, swinging his mallet gracefully. Young Craven would fling down his, or send a ball skimming into the distance with a savage stroke. He would not speak, save in a short surly way. "Jealousy," thought Mr. Crowle, with a simper—and was hugely gratified. It was all atoned for by Miss Charlotte's sweetness and attention. It was very marked—curiously marked—thought Mr. Crowle—and was very acceptable.

Young Craven's views and "intentions" were gradually becoming very significant; and it was plain, to common observers, would gradually work themselves clear. Before "Young Capias" he froze up. Presently, however, he grew sarcastic, at least as sarcastic as his rough open manly temper would let him, and directed a few crude scoffs in the direction of "Young Capias," it must be said to the infinite delight of the latter. "Jealousy," thought he, and welcomed it with complacency. Something, however, came about presently; and at the end of the second week of young Craven's visit, which, as it were, cleared the air, but made the way very free and open for all parties, a very simple incident—unworthy and almost mean in a historic sense, but with curious results for the future direction of this narrative—took place.

Down by the edge of the lake was a pleasant little grove of trees, which stretched out in a sort of diminutive peninsula into the waters. The head gardener—an ingenious Scot—who had a fancy for training little conceits, in whatever resources were at his disposal, had cut out a sort of sheltered retreat among the trees—very grateful and acceptable during the hot summer days; and it had become a fashion with members of the Franklyn family

to lay out little expeditions to this spot—to have tea on the island, or strawberries on the island ;—in fact, when anything delicate or acceptable was to be taken, to have it, by any possible excuse, taken down for consumption to the island. The article, of whatever kind, was always held to acquire a richer flavour by the process.

Since the coming of young Welbore Craven, this little retreat had acquired additional popularity. The ploughman, or other agricultural labourer who was homeward plodding his weary way, was often startled by the sounds of boisterous merriment proceeding from the depths of this retreat.

And here, towards five o'clock of one Thursday, were our party gathered; seated, it must be said, with discomfort about a little table, with the "sensible girl" making tea.

It was "jolly"—delightful—"such fun." Everything, in fact. The fair youth, with the pink cheeks and saffron moustaches, was seated on a smooth ruinous trunk of a tree, which would not remain steady (unavoidably from its natural formation), and that was "such fun." The teapot was upset, and that was still greater "fun." But the height of enjoyment was reached when young Craven built up some dried sticks very neatly together, under a little portable kettle, and drawing a Vesuvian from his cigar-case set the sticks on fire, and actually boiled the water—which, when poured out, made real tea, not very different from what was partaken of every morning at breakfast.

The relish with which this ordinary beverage was consumed it is impossible to describe; and the whole, it must be again repeated, was eminently "fun" in the

highest degree. And at the bottom of all the "fan" was young Craven.

"I wonder," said one of the girls, suddenly, "that he hasn't found us out here."

"We need not be too sure of that as yet," said the other.

"He—who?" said the sensible girl.

"Odious Young Capias," said the first, smartly. "He was to be out to-day to see papa."

"What a creature it is!" said young Craven. "I am beginning to detest him. I can't bring myself to speak to him. And he is getting so forward and free-and-easy. I snubbed him finely the other day."

"But Charlotte likes him," said one of the girls. "He is one of her pets."

The youth burst into loud peals of laughter.

"I've remarked it," he said. "She gets uneasy when we are rough to him. I assure you, she has a great interest in him."

There was truth in this, for the sensible girl knew, or believed that she knew, how useful a friend he was to her embarrassed father.

"No," she said; "I have no great love for Mr. Crowle. But I cannot conceive why you all dislike him so. He is very good in his own particular line."

"That's it, exactly," said the youth, noisily. "Why doesn't he keep to his own particular line? His is not the line of ladies and gentlemen. He's a low creature—a low, crawling, slimy creature," added he, with much disgust.

"Oh!" said Charlotte, almost with alarm, and yet smiling. "What a description!"

"Just what he deserves," said one of the girls.

"Confound him," said the youth: "can't he drudge among his papers, and briefs, and six and eightpences? Why is he always hanging on to us? He really puts me in such a rage. And then, when he tries to be sweet and smooth—confound him—why, I could just take him up by the back of the neck as I would a puppy dog."

"Hush! hush!" said the sensible girl. "Poor wretch! he can't help it."

"I tell you what—wouldn't it be a good joke—a splendid idea, by Jove?"

"What, what?" said the younger girls, cagerly.

"If he were to come poking after us to-day—which he will;—suppose we were all to hide; we'll take away the sticks which join the island, make a little bridge of twigs, then cover it over with grass and sods. He will come across with his greasy simper, and go souse in."

They all laughed in exquisite delight at this notion—even the sensible girl.

"Poor Mr. Capias," she said, "what treatment you are laying out for him—but it is very funny. The idea of him splashing about there."

"Like an eel," said one of the girls.

"He will glisten like a snake in the water, you will see," said young Craven.

"He will change colour like a dying frog."

"For shame," said the sensible girl.

"Oh, I see," said young Craven; "this is private property. Miss Charlotte's own. We must take care."

"Not at all," said Charlotte, colouring ever so little; "I hate the creature too. He is odious in every sense;

but we mustn't plague him ; papa would be dreadfully annoyed."

It was agreed he should not be plagued, and perhaps the result was the same.

It could not have succeeded ; for Mr. Crowle had actually, about half an hour before, arrived at the house on business—had, by way of commencing business promptly, asked for the young ladies—had been told they were down at the island drinking tea, and had set off smirking and smiling, and with a light step, to join the youthful party. What so natural ? The young should consort with the young. He had heard the chatter of their voices among the trees, and had stopped, anxious not to disturb them or come upon them with too much surprise. The young man of business among the trees listened to this idle chatter, no doubt, with unconcern ; but another ploughman, homeward plodding his weary way, met him suddenly, just as he began to move, and though generally careless of physiognomy, was struck by the savage smile and impatient gestures of the young man of business, who was, besides, talking to himself ; and the ploughman looked for a long while after him, muttering something about "clean daft." Mr. Crowle did not join the party of young people that day, though at dinner he was pleasant and agreeable as usual. No one would have detected any change in his feelings towards them all. He was a very skilful creature, this young man of business, but very vain—ridiculously vain—sensitive to a degree, and specially sensitive on his personal charms. Any affront therefore in that direction galled him sorely. The only thing observed, and observed too with delight, was that he fell away by degrees from that old association

with the amusements of the younger people ; and that he now and again gave out oracular utterances, curiously pointed and full of mystery, chiefly relating to the uncertain course of human affairs. These he would address to Miss Charlotte, with an attempt at fierce sarcasm ; and these were afterwards a source of intense amusement to the whole family, who would treasure them up, and have them repeated over and over again by young Craven, in the tone and manner of the original.

So the warp and woof of life at the Franklyns' moved on slowly for a week or so more, and was working into a quiet pattern. The Crowle thread was gradually being withdrawn, but two other threads were gradually being brought closer together. Finally, one evening the quiet girl came to her father's study, and without flutter or agitation, but just as though she came to tell him that Johnson, the steward, was waiting to see him, told him how young Welbore Craven had that very evening made her a most important proposal, one on which the whole wilderness of her life depended—hopes, fears, joys, and sorrows.

CHAPTER XIV.

A DEFIANCE.

MR. FRANKLYN had sweet sleep that night. The sigh of joy and relief he drew, as the welcome news was told to him, was deep and refreshing. He had often dreamt of this event, but never thought it possible. He forebore delving among those wretched papers. Something like hope was in store for him yet; clouds were clearing away a little—might wholly clear away, after all. Charlotte, the calm, steady, sensible girl, might save the family. His dear Charlotte—his good, faithful, comforting child.

As a match, nothing could be better or more delightful. Sir Welbore, the father, was favourable. There was title, fortune, station. Everything was favourable. There was ecstatic joy through the house—the boisterous girls could have tumbled and thrown somersaults on the floor, to show their delight. And that dear, honest, broad-chested, good, open fellow, who was now recklessly distributing golden presents up and down the house—was there one whom we would have preferred before him? A darling!

It got about presently—was announced, as it were, officially. The county papers inserted their paragraphs with the usual intelligible hieroglyphics. Mr. Crowle, who had been away, came back one morning, had his cold hand taken affectionately in Mr. Franklyn's, and was told the glad tidings. He winced, but broke out presently into affluent smiles and paroxysms of delight, and

congratulated heartily. Going away—for he would not stay to dinner—he met the curate, Mr. Wells, posting up to the house, radiant.

“Such good news,” said the curate. “Did you hear, Mr. Crowle? O, I am so glad! Are you not?”

“Oh, yes; charmed—delighted,” said the other. “Such a pleasant piece of news—so agreeable for all parties.”

“But how glad Miss Bell will be! She will hardly contain herself. You know she was *so* fond of Miss Charlotte.”

“Ah, indeed!” said Mr. Crowle. “I never knew that. By-the-way, we have not heard of Miss Jenny Bell lately. Nice person she was. Who *has* heard of her?”

“I have. I hear from her constantly,” said the curate with a flush of pride. “I write to her regularly—she wishes to hear everything that goes on in this dear family, as she calls them.”

“Oh! I see,” said Mr. Crowle. “Quite so.”

“And especially,” the curate went on, cagerly, “about Miss Charlotte, her bosom friend. I think,” said Mr. Wells, “I know nothing, or have read nothing comparable to her affection for Miss Charlotte, who is now to be so happily married.”

“Ah! indeed,” said Mr. Crowle, showing all his teeth in one delighted smile. “How curious! And so you keep up a correspondence with Miss Bell?”

“Oh, yes!” said the other; “I must write by this very night’s post to tell her the news. I am going to get all the particulars I can.”

“I see,” said Mr. Crowle. “Very good; quite right.

"Ah! I see. I suspected it when Miss Jenny was here. Don't be angry ; but I *did* see she was very much grieved to go."

The curate's cheeks began to flush, but he was not displeased.

"Nonsense," he said, "Mr. Crowle. A poor curate must not think of such things. Oh, Mr. Crowle," he added, growing suddenly confidential, "what a pity it was ; and such a charming, engaging creature. Her conduct was noble—noble ! I never heard of anything like it."

"Noble, certainly," said Mr. Crowle ; "noble is exactly the word."

"Who in her position would have done the like ? "

"Who, indeed ? " said Mr. Crowle. "By-the-way, what is her address ? Somewhere in London ? "

The clergyman grew suspicious. "Her address ? " he said. "She's out somewhere as a governess."

"So I heard," said Mr. Crowle, still smiling. "I suppose they will tell me at the house ? "

"Oh, of course," said the curate, hastily ; "Chesterfield Street, Mayfair."

"Thanks—thanks—thanks," said Mr. Crowle, very sweetly. "What trouble I must have given you. Not that I want to write to her. I should like to leave my card when in London. Good-bye, good-bye."

And the young man of business went his way ; and the road being lonely, began to smile and talk to himself, as was his indiscreet habit.

CHAPTER XV.

A SURPRISE.

"SUCH joyful news," wrote the curate, that very evening, over his huckster's shop, striving hard to gain the post. "Such joyful news, my dearest Miss Bell, as I have to communicate! I dare say you will guess already. Think of some one whom you love above all things; and every change in whose fortunes *must* be so dear to you. Not our common friend, dear Mr. Franklyn, but some one else. Think again. Ah! I see you know. Yes, my dear Miss Bell, it is all settled—was settled two days ago. Our dear Miss Charlotte is to be Mrs. Welbore Craven for the present; eventually Lady Craven. Splendid house, place, pictures, state, grandeur, and what not. Her husband is all that is good. Every one loves him; I don't know how you would like him; he must have many virtues to please *you*. But he is to be her husband, and that is a character which, with you, will cover all imperfections. They are all out of themselves with joy. Between ourselves, my dear Miss Jenny, it is believed that this happy step will put an end to the little pressure which has so long hampered the movements of this dear family. It is considered the most brilliant match known in this county for long; and everybody says our bride is the happiest and most deserving of women. She bears her good fortune, I assure you, very well," &c.

The Rev. Charlton Wells received no answer to his letter; but four days afterwards, Mr. Franklyn, sitting

in his study, received a letter in Jenny's little writing, and marked "private," in letters as large as her little round fingers could form them. Mr. Franklyn read to this effect :—

"Private.

"Chesterfield Street.

"DEAREST MR. FRANKLYN,

"I have just heard of the joyful news of dearest Miss Franklyn's marriage. How happy it must make you all ! How happy it will make him ! for though I have not seen him as yet, he *must* be good and brave and generous to have won her. You, too, dear Sir, who have lived in the world and know men and women so well, will have read off all his virtues and good qualities !

"How happy you must all be ! I, dear Sir, am getting accustomed to my new *place*. I even like it ; for they are very good to me ; but never do I expect to be so happy again as in dear Grey Forest. How my heart yearns to it ! I have not been well of late, for the duty is severe ; but am better now, thank Heaven. Once, indeed, I thought I could only live in the fresh breezes and green glades of darling old Grey Forest ; but I had strength enough given me to get over that foolish notion. Persons with the life I have before me, must learn to be independent of place, and even of affections. I remember, dear Sir, your hinting this to me *so* kindly and delicately, just before I left ; and I cannot tell you how often that precious advice has comforted me, as I look to it in my diary. I repeat, dearest Sir, I am now much better, and shall soon learn to smile at the notion of change of air,

and such luxuries. I assure you, Chesterfield Street is considered a very good situation.

"Let me again congratulate you, and dearest Miss Franklyn. Let me thank you again and again for all your goodness, dearest Mr. Franklyn, to the little exile,

"JENNY BELL."

At the desolate tone pervading this simple letter, Mr. Franklyn was greatly moved. He had well-nigh forgotten the little exile by this time; for little exiles, from the fact of their exiles, easily drop out of the memory; but it brought back to him her brave, noble—yes, it was noble—behaviour in the affair of the marriage. We are apt to accept such things as of course; but really for one in her lonely, unfriended position, when we come to think of it, it was a very unusual bit of self-denial. He was touched as he thought of it—there was even a pang of self-reproach. Failing health—the drudgery of a governess. He started—the very thing!

He would write himself to Mr. Maxwell. Her poor, pale cheek should be freshened by the breezes of "dear old Grey Forest." How attached she was to the place! Longing, yearning for it—beating against the bars of her cage. Yes, he would write to Mr. Maxwell himself. Jenny's letter was marked private; so he would say not a word to the rest of the family. Besides, what a pleasant surprise for Charlotte—Jenny coming on a visit!

Before the week was out, Mr. Franklyn called in his daughter, with a smile on his face. "Charlotte, dear, a moment! I have such a surprise for you. Guess."

It took a great deal to surprise the sensible girl.

But she was very amiable, and feigned a little excitement for the occasion. "Do tell me, dear papa."

"Do you know who is coming? Guess, I say."

Charlotte thought, and shook her head. "Some aunt? some cousin?"

"There, Charlotte," he said, putting Mr. Maxwell's letter into her hand; "there—are you not glad? I knew you would."

He passed again into his study; but over the placid features of the sensible girl something like a spasm of consternation flitted, and she mechanically put her hand to her side; but it was only for a moment—something like a smile of quiet defiance took its place.

Almost at the same instant our Jenny was at work in Chesterfield Street, up in her little room, exultingly turning over her little goods and properties. She was singing and she was dancing, and a more than usually brilliant flush was in her plump cheeks. Was not the prospect of getting down again to "darling old Grey Forest" enough to set her wild? Her little Letts' Diary lay upon the table, and as she looked at it *her* expression changed too—something like an electric challenge seemed to have passed between the two women. *She* is going down to meet her dear Charlotte once more! What issue shall there be for this second struggle?

CHAPTER XVI.

JENNY RETURNS.

It is hard to conceive how the afflicted family in Chesterfield Street could have got on without our trusty Jenny. The mother, a wretched invalid, tottering over the edge of the Valley of the Shadow; the father, in the world and yet out of it, and in the matter of pounds and shillings, about as helpless as an infant; the lower members yet more disorganised; no head, no government; how was that domestic craft to be piloted?

Mr. Maxwell found great profit in her kind services; slowly and by degrees his sight mended. Jenny was so quick—so ready—so open to the merest shred of a hint; so capable of absorbing new matter and ideas, that she really seemed to Mr. Maxwell to do the work more deftly than his own clerk. The precious auxiliaries of his sight having gone into hospital, as it were, were gradually getting back to health, from sheer repose; Jenny, in her own delicate way, repressing firmly that idle longing of his to work them before they were yet strong enough to bear work. He was very grateful, and actually from habit began to like the joint labouring together by night. Suddenly arrived that letter from Mr. Franklyn, which struck him, as it were, all of a heap.

At first he did not remember who Franklyn was. Then he called down Jenny. Jenny was working some little petticoat edging or fringing, but she gave it up cheerfully, though it was not her legitimate hour for

labour. She would work the whole day long gladly ; anything to be useful.

"Miss Bell," said he, "here is a most extraordinary letter. I don't understand it. Who are these people that want you ? "

Jenny's eyes opened with a gentle wonder and speculation. She took the letter mechanically, and gave a low tempered ejaculation of delight, a suppressed start, for hers was a very well-regulated mind. "Dear Mr. Franklin," she said, "that darling family ! "

"Then you know them ? " said Mr. Maxwell, uneasily.

"Know them, Sir ! " said Jenny, again doing the eye movement ; "know them ? Ah, Sir ! how kind of them ! how good ! how generous, to think in all their happiness of the little exile. So they used to call me."

"But you will not go ? " he said, still more uneasily ; "you will not leave me. You know you have got quite into the way of the thing—in fact, you are quite indispensable to me. What am I to do ? "

Jenny was touched.

"Oh ! Sir," she said ; "oh ! Sir ! "

She was a little indistinct as to what she meant by this ejaculation, yet still it seemed to convey a good deal.

"You are very well," said he ; "at least I hope so. Your health has not suffered ; at least, you will say so if it has ; and I'm sure if salary——"

"Oh, Sir ! " said Jenny, with the gentlest inflection of reproach, "do I complain—would I complain ? I am sure I would work in my small way for *you*, Sir, and the dear family," she added, "if I was sick, if I was weary, if I was breaking down, and was at the last gasp——"

"But you *are* not ill," said he, looking on her round ruddy cheeks.

Jenny was speechless a moment ; gave a deep sigh—then paused—and finally said softly—

"Ah ! Sir, I was reared, and brought up among the green fields, and the trees, and the brooks, the sweet smell of the hay, the fresh open country air. Is it unnatural that I should look back wistfully to those happy days ? Is it unnatural that I should pine to meet again the friends of my childhood ? Is it unnatural——"

Here Jenny paused ; partly because she was not skillful enough to frame the same idea in a third different shape. Poor child, she was a little confused, too, having never, so far as her friends knew, been reared among that sweet-smelling hay, or green fields. She had confounded her short residence at the Franklyns' with the whole span of her youth, which, it is believed, was consumed in the unwholesome atmosphere of a crowded city.

Mr. Maxwell accepted the position mournfully. He saw how cruelly selfish it would be to detain her. The long confinement, too, must have been prejudicial to one reared on the sweet breath of the country. Ill, too, she might have been all this while ; for those round blooming cheeks were often anything but certain evidence of robust health. "Of course," he said, at last with a sigh, "you *must* go. It is quite right you should, and I was very thoughtless to dream for a moment of detaining you."

"Go !" said Jenny, opening her wonderful eyes once more ; "go ! go where ?" she was amazed, confounded. "Do you think," she added, "I would leave you in these straits, with dear Mrs. Maxwell so ill, and the dear

children with no one to look after them, and you, dear Sir"—she stopped—"No, Sir; you don't know me yet."

It went on for some time that little dispute. Mr. Maxwell was firm. Jenny was also firm. She would not go; she would stay. If she was put upon her honour, of course she could not strictly say that she felt as strong as she *had* felt, but still she was very strong, *very* strong, and could do a deal of work. There was Stoodly and Masham,—that injunction, wasn't it? not half done; and Jenny smiled. No, she must stay and do her work.

But he was equally firm. Go she must. It flashed upon him that he had been all this time a little selfish and inconsiderate. If, indeed, she could come back early—that is, without inconvenience to herself—*she* knew what invaluable assistance she could afford him, &c.

But here was another difficulty. With reluctance and infinite delicacy, with grief of mind, too, feeling inexpressibly for him, it was at last wrung from her—coy, reluctant, hesitating—that indeed, perhaps, it would be for the best that there should be a little *temporary* absence from the scene. Still, *that* was not it. She would gladly put up with all that and more, for the sake of the family, oh yes!

Mr. Maxwell, now 'thoroughly outside the committee room—miles away, in fact—could not comprehend. Jenny again hinted ever so delicately. She would not for the world bring discord into *that* family. But still she saw—she *knew*, she was unacceptable to——. • Perhaps it was her fault—no doubt it was.

Mr. Maxwell, with counsel's instinct, leaped at once to what she was alluding. He shook his head sadly.

"We must make allowance for the sick," he said; "they are often unreasonable. A little patience." Jenny was all protest in an instant. She would bear, oh yes; she could not say how much, all for the sake of that dear family. She had only mentioned it because of *their* sakes. Did she mind herself? Oh! no, no, no, &c.

In short, it was debated with a spirit of much self-sacrifice on both sides. Jenny was to go for her health's sake; that health which was so much shattered, and needed restoration so sadly. She *had*, indeed, worked very hard, poor child.

In two days' time the little trunk was brought down, and once more packed to go back again to "dear old Grey Forest." Dear old Grey Forest, how the heart of the little exile yearned to it! The place where she had been brought up, where as a child she had gambled! So fond was she of the place, it was natural that she should actually give way to this pleasant delusion. No one could well be angry with her for so affectionate a mistake.

It was curious, that going back again once more; especially to one looking back and thinking of the time the little black trunk was packed. And she took care to put up, among her other little properties, that Letts' Diary which she always took about with her.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PARTY AT GREY FOREST.

At Grey Forest was a full house. The housekeeper, had made an effort; the cook had made an effort; Mr. Franklyn himself had struggled to the surface of his papers, and taking breath for a few hours, had himself made a tremendous effort. But, in truth, the whole work fell upon the sensible girl—so calm, so business-like, so practical, so useful upon occasions of emergency like the present. She was Field-Marshal Domestic. Where there was strain and pressure—and there was strain and pressure in all manner of directions—she contrived to meet it. The legionaries had to be fresh drilled, new ones recruited, and abundant victualling had to be got in. The whole being what a metropolitan legionary, brought down especially to organise the waiting “service,” called “a state visit,” required all elements to be on a “state” footing—men, women, fittings, provisions, and adjuncts of all descriptions; the whole of which task fell specially on the shoulders of the sensible girl, who did not allow all that was already on her own shoulders—so interesting and so important—to stand in the way a moment. All the house was in spirits. And, here was Sir Welbore Craven, Baronet, and Lady Catherine Craven, wife of the above, with Sir Welbore’s own intimate man and Lady Catherine’s own woman *a secretis*, and a whole wain-load of luggage

already established in the house. Already the professional lady, chartered specially to supervise the victualling, began to exhibit cheeks inflamed and angry from too prolonged contiguity to a raging furnace. The ordinary familiarity of professional intercourse was in her case found dangerous, and anything like reproof utterly fatal. She was not in fact to be addressed under the load of awful responsibility; and ordinary men and women shrunk away from her—as from a cook more than mortal.

For the festival, too, had come (this gathering was not for the ceremonial between the Houses which was to take place up in London, but to pay honour to the illustrious family of Craven) other distinguished guests. There was staying in the house the new Bishop, who had been lately appointed to the See of Leighton-Buzzard, a person who has been before met at Mr. Franklyn's, an old friend of that family—Mr. Archdeacon Dilly, in short, who has just been measured for a mitre. That great Missionary Society, whose "perfect organisation, whether we look at it in its ready capacity for expansion, or for its equal susceptibility of a judicious contraction according to the exigencies of the moment, must be looked on as one of the most wonderful organisations of this wonderful nineteenth century." *Charge of the Rev. James Waghorne Bridges, D.D.; Lord Bishop of Leighton-Buzzard, at his first Annual Visitation, pp. 166-7*—had borne fruit. In fact, it was no secret that it was the Foreign Missionary interest, with the silent yet powerful support of that well-known missionary nobleman, Lord Buryshaft, who might be said to have never stirred out of the chair of a religious

public meeting all his life, that gently propelled the Archdeacon into the bishop's stall. Being, too, of the rough dragoons ecclesiastical, and, as it were, always in the saddle, scouring the country for Dissenters, he soon came under notice as an active trooper that deserved promotion. Being now in command, he was doubly active; and presently had driven the wretched Dissenters of Leighton-Buzzard to their holes and caves in the mountains. His corps, stirred on by such a leader, became about as notorious and favourably known to fame as Probyn's or Fane's Horse in India; and Leighton-Buzzard and the diocese surrounding became presently blazing far and near with the flames of religious conflagration. The old friend and newly-frocked bishop had been invited to do honour to Sir Welbore and Lady Mary Craven. So had another friend—young Wells, the curate, as elderly people of the parish called him, and who had literally "put in" piteously, and almost *in formâ pauperis* for the honour. He had nearly died of elation when the joyful news came to him, and he had to exchange his huckster's first floor for the solemn state of Grey Forest. Mr. Crowle also, though highly unsuitable as a guest in many senses, was bidden mainly at the instigation of the sensible girl, who had noted with misgiving the late change in his manner, and the strange defiant looks that at times shot from his eyes.

He accepted with a joyful eagerness that she could not comprehend; and with new clothes and gayer and more satin manners, became more like a glistening snake than ever. There was also in the house a generic guest or two—the generic young guest, lawyer or soldier ("Privatman," say the German *Kür* lists); the

generic middle-aged stout guest, who is good-humour and good-nature (with a firm belief in his own jocularities), walking about. Smith or Wilson will do as well as other names for these prevailing types.

Sir Welbore was a type in his way ; so was Lady Mary Craven. He was tall, puffed, and fluffed, stiff, and of a gentlemanly stoutness ; more the fulness of port wine, than stoutness proper. He had a mild glow in his countenance of a tender pink—not the coarse exhibition of vulgar fat, but the more delicate *pâte tendre* from the Sèvres manufactory of nobility. He was always correctly and neatly dressed, and wore a pale blue neckerchief. He spoke in a solemn and sonorous voice, and always seemed to be striking his sentence on a domestic peal of bells hung somewhere within. His utterances were majestic and concerned his country's good—his country's corn—his country's politics ; and, above all, his country's *Times*. He consulted that keeper of the nation's conscience far more frequently than any work in the world—not even excepting his banker's book and his family Bible.

Lady Mary Craven was stately, too, and of full majestic proportions. She was of good ripe quality.

But for rich and copious details of his magnificence we turn over the scarlet book of glory, compiled by Ulster, and find the scroll of his titles there inscribed :

“CRAVEN.

“SIR WELBORE CHARLES HITCHINBROKE CRAVEN, 4th Baronet, of Craven-Weldington, Suffolk, b. 1796 ; m.

Mary, 5th dau. of John, 6th Earl of Topplingstones; and by her had issue :

"1. CHARLES WELBORE, *b.* 1837.

"2. GWEDOLINA-MATILDA, *b.* 1838.

"3. PILASTER-GREGORY, *b.* 1839.

"CREST—A Cat ramp.

"MOTTO—*Je tiens mes ongles prêts.*"

They were now firmly established in the mansion of the Franklyns, and cast an air of terrible formality over the modest establishment. For the view that was obtained of them was always a state view; and the speech that was obtained of them was always a state speech, delivered, as it were, from the throne; and common mortals had to be more or less guarded in their choice of language, not attempting any freedoms or pleasantries of diction, which would have been a gross outrage, and pronounced *lèse-majesté*. The whole mass, the stately and unstately, the lay and episcopal, were now all fused together, and the various particles working in detrition against each other for some days past. With the young people it was pleasant enough, the social wheels moved on very smoothly. But with Mr. Franklyn it was sad up-hill work. Latterly he had got more or less out of the world. He knew not how to cast his thoughts and language in the mould fitted to great and stately people. The Cravens hung a good deal upon his hands

He stood much in awe of Sir Welbore. At breakfast, when that embodiment of state came down, his first act was to secure the Leading Journal (newly arrived by

post), with something that almost amounted to greediness. His prior claim being thus established, he addressed himself in a calm and leisurely fashion to his morning meal; and when that was finished took out his gold glass, fitted with a thick black ribbon, fixed them on leisurely, spread out the huge amplitude of the *Leading Journal*, inhaled its fresh dampish flavour with a sort of relish, and began to read. This task helped him through the morning. He was seen, moving about the house slowly, with his *Leading Journal* in his hand, spread out before him like a printed shield. He held slow conversations reclined back in his soft arm-chair, and looking over the edge of the *Leading Journal*. He even wrote his letters politely accommodating the *Leading Journal* with a chair close beside him. But he surveyed that Power warily all the while, and said to any casual spoliator rather snappishly, "I beg your pardon, for one moment, I am not *quite* finished with the *Times* as yet."

It must be mentioned that there was rather a hostile feeling engendered between this potentate and the Lord Bishop of Leighton-Buzzard, who had also a sort of tempered thirst for public intelligence, and for the columns of the leading journal — which, though Arian and heterodox in every sense, was still reliable as a channel of sure and easy communication. The Lord Bishop, who was sharp and terse in manner and conduct, and who, if there had been no Dissenters on the mountains and moors of society, would have turned his fowling tendencies in another direction, rather resented this monopoly on the Baronet's part. So when the *Leading Journal* is on the chair beside the Baronet, who is at

the writing-table, the Bishop enters gaily in his full hunting costume, very neat-limbed below, and says, gaily, "Ha, ha! so here we have the *Times*. To-day's *Times*, I believe;" and tripping up softly, as though he had "set" a Dissenter, and were anticipating a pleasant shot.

To him, Sir Welbore uneasily, and putting over his arm to guard his property: "In one moment, my lord, just finishing my letter. Hem! Most interesting article on the magistrates. You shall have it when I have done."

"My dear Sir Welbore," answers the Bishop, "don't hurry yourself, I shall skim it while you complete your voluminous correspondence;" and the Bishop makes a sort of right skirmishing attempt to cut off the Leading Journal, taking an unhandsome advantage of both Sir Welbore's hands being engaged. Ruefully then, the Baronet, seeing he could not decently keep his ground, would throw down his pen, sacrifice his correspondence, and, with a dry smile, retire again into his soft arm-chair. "I shall not detain you long," he would say. "*Times* really most interesting to-day."

CHAPTER XVIII.

JENNY'S RECEPTION.

SUDDENLY, while this "loose miscellany," as one of our great but grotesque thinkers would put it, was working together, a little one-horse chaise, with a little shrinking black trunk, tied up with cord, placed beside the driver, was seen driving up the avenue to the distant crunching of wheels—a music which for those who live in country-houses is very welcome and exciting, and has a whole gamut of notes of its own. Nearly all were in their rooms dressing for dinner. Episcopus was donning his apron, in which he would descend glistening like a clerical snake. Baronettus de Welbore (so the pursuivants would call his style and title) was about getting into his evening armour, the various pieces whereof—the coat of mail, the ankle-bits, and above all the rigid starched gorget, lay upon a chair ready. The curate, positively resplendent, was already in the drawing-room in a delirium of expectation. Fitfully, and off and on as it were, he had been dressing the whole day. And yet, save this poor faithful soul, there was not one in the house who looked forward to our Jenny's coming with delight. No one spoke of it, no one referred to it. It was not announced to bishop or baronet. The sensible girl never mentioned it—some way the younger girls had lost their old clinging fondness for their Jenny. It seemed a blue chamber for them, which they were not to look into. Mr. Franklyn was too absorbed to think of it. So here was cold and cheerless store of entertainment

for our Jenny. Every one heard the crunching, and such, at least, as knew of her coming, started. And yet, Jenny was not down-hearted, though she had an instinct of what was waiting her; but her brave little spirit rose with the danger. She had pluck, courage, and what not. She was smiling to herself all the way, as the little chaise took the bends and sweeps of the avenue. She was thinking of the happy days spent in Grey Forest; of her childhood's happy hours; her gambols in the grass years ago. (No; by the force of imagination we always *do* fall into that mistake, and take Jenny back ever so many years.) 'Perhaps she was thinking—dreaming of such matters. Who can tell? Here was the door; the porch in its ancient cloak of ivy. There was the old servant opening the door, whom our Jenny, jumping out, recognises with delight. She shakes hands with him; an *accolade* welcomed but dryly by the retainer; and crossing the hall, coming from the housekeeper's room (she has not heard the wheels), is our dear, our darling Charlotte—friend of childhood, playmate, intimate, everything; at whom our Jenny flies like a bird, winds her in her arms, and covers with kisses. Forgiveness to the injured, &c.; and recollect how much Jenny had to forget. The sensible girl feels a sort of pang at this behaviour, so gracious and unexpected. A feeling, too, compounded of embarrassment; for, very honest and straightforward, and in the habit of looking straight into other people's eyes, she knew in her heart that these were not the affectionate terms upon which *they could* be on for the future. She took, therefore, Jenny's endearments in a sort of undecided way, and asked her, would she like to see her room?

To them—all assembled for dinner, which some way acquired a sort of state imperial air from the presence of the Welbore Craven element, which insensibly awed every one present, and obliged them to comport themselves as at a royal banquet—entered modest Jenny—not full into the centre, but skirting round by the corners. Mr. Franklyn whispered Sir Welbore Craven, who now, with all his armour on, and properly tightened and burnished, was on the rug for exhibition. He said, “Ha! hum! I see; quite right and proper;” and then continued his synopsis of a “remarkable article in the *Times* of this morning!”

Lady Mary Craven, who was sitting enthroned, as it were, sniffed the gale from afar, such as was wafted from the horizon to her, and did not seem to relish it. With her Jenny was “a person,” or “that person,” or “the person I saw last night”—in the dictionaries an inoffensive word enough, but about which, in common use hovers an unpleasant flavour. The curate would have fallen at her feet, and came up hot and awkward, and made Jenny awkward before a mixed company, by his spasmodic raptures. He was pouring out his welcome, when Jenny quietly smiled herself away from him, beaming on him; yet steadily retreating into the bosom of the girls, where she became absorbed. Yet she did not offend him, for there was a glance of mystery which seemed to say, “There is a secret between us.”

Over on the ottoman sat young Craven and Charlotte. Jenny recognised him at once. She knew his quality.

“So that is he, Mr. Craven, dears,” she whispered loudly to the girls. “How noble! how grand! how handsome! how happy our dear Charlotte must be!”

The drawing-room at Grey Forest was not very large ; every one was pretty near to each other. Presently the procession was formed. They were marshalled two and two by the heralds according to their ranks, and moved on in order. Jenny and her curate walked together.

By the merest accident Jenny got placed next the royalty of the banquet, gorgeous in his armour. On the other side of him was Charlotte ; and beyond Charlotte, her knight and own true love. Baronettus tolerated his future relation very handsomely for one he knew so little of ; for every one that he knew little of, he looked on with suspicion. For a woman, if he *wcs* to find fault and be critical, he thought there was far too much independence. More reliance on the opinion of others, he thought, might have become her better ; which translated into Craven dialect, signified more obsequiousness to the voice of the King of the Welbores. Episcopus was opposite ; he had the generic Smith on one side, Mr. Franklyn on the other ; he was singing of the Dissenter to both. Baronettus looked down from over his mailed gorget on his future daughter-in-law. She was inclining her head to her true lover. He looked to his left, down upon Jenny, who at that second had been looking up to him with awe-struck, shrinking eyes, and had withdrawn them on being detected in the guilty act. He was not displeased ; secret homage, even fear, was welcome. This was a proper young person—not forward, but mindful of her station. It did not, besides, become the house of Craven to be silent. There was no harm in encouraging the lower ranks. So he said, with a sort of husky magnificence, “ Came far to-day, Miss—Miss—er—Odell ? ”

Jenny expressed much trepidation and alarm at this condescension, which was perceived with gratification by the illustrious speaker. With falling voice, Jenny said she had come "very far, indeed, Sir—from London."

"Ha, hum, quite proper," said he, to reassure her. "A vast city, London; the modern emporium of the world. I am not one of those who look upon our capital as outgrowing its vital energies—as absorbing too much from the extremities. No; centralisation, under properly regulated conditions, I look on as good—more or less good."

Jenny was eating a little fish at the time, had actually a small portion of sole in her mouth, yet so absorbed was she in the surpassing interest of these remarks, that she suspended further deglutition, and with eyes fixed on the Baronet in devout admiration, remained immovable while he developed his theory.

"You will say, how is this compatible—how is this consistent? The vital forces must be either in the tree or the branches—in the heart or the limbs. Come, now? —(Champagne, if you please.)"

Jenny took advantage of the moment, and by a hurried motion got her bit of fish down. She was then ready devoutly to receive more political economy.

"I recollect old Lord Ploughshare," continued he, wiping his mouth decently with a napkin, "who sat a long time for our county—but that's a long story—was quite nonplussed when I put *that* view of mine to him. 'It's a paradox,' he said; 'and yet there's common sense in it. How *do* you do it, Craven?' he said. He was right. To most ordinary people it would seem a paradox."

Jenny lifted her eyes devoutly. "Oh, how clever!" she said, softly. "How wonderful! Oh, *so* clever!"

Sir Welbore smiled on her. "If you studied these things, they would not seem so difficult to you.—(Hock, please.)"

"They would kill me," said Jenny, with terror. "It must have taken you years of study, Sir." And then conscious that this was not complimenting the Baronet's natural talents, she added again, as if in a reverie, "Oh, *so* clever—how clever! How wonderful!"

Sir Welbore was much pleased with himself during that meal. He went to his mental desks and shelves and brought down some more little pet theories, about "prices," "the poor," and other matters. Between the courses he introduced these subjects to Jenny with a good deal of majestic waving of hands.

"I do not show these views to every one," he said, "and indeed I must beg of you not to mention them. You understand. Some of these days, perhaps; but no matter—h'm——"

Poor Jenny! There was no serious danger of her betraying those weighty theories. What a patient listener she was—all, too, in a spirit of self-sacrifice—for the lecturer was stern and tyrannical, and exacted the most unflinching attention when he expounded his views.

He fixed his eye on Jenny when dealing with "prices," and, morally speaking, seemed to require that she was not to eat while *he* spoke. Jenny, though hungry with her ride, and who sometimes lamented the good healthy appetite which nature had furnished to her, took in "prices" very sweetly instead of the dainties fitting by her.

"I cannot quite expect you to follow me," said he, towards dessert ("fine peaches, these, really fine peaches"), but still I make myself intelligible. I think so, at least."

"Intelligible," said Jenny, taking a peach that was offered to her, in the most noiseless way in the world; "oh, it is wonderful. I always thought they were *dreadful* things. But now, somehow, I seem to get glimpses—little flashes of light, as it were, which——"

"Ah, h'm—quite so," said he complacently. "They *do* give me credit for a certain lucidity in putting forward my views. Old Lord Ploughshare used to say, in his odd way, 'Craven, there is no man who helps me to look through a milestone like you.' It was his plain way of putting it. But he meant it as a compliment."

"Ah, Sir," said Jenny, peeling her peach in a surreptitious way, as if she was merely curious as to *how* a peach was constructed, "there is our dear Miss Franklyn, who is so shortly to be of your family, she can understand these subjects. How I envy her. What an opportunity for one of her tastes. She can learn so much and enrich her mind. She will have time to hear these marvellous theories at leisure. I *do* envy her," added Jenny, in a little rapture, under cover of which she managed to get a small segment of a peach, long prepared for the first convenient opportunity, into her mouth.

"She?—my daughter-in-law that is to be," said he with some constraint. "Why, do you know that is the only point on which she has not *quite* come up to my views? Whether from a peculiar formation of mind, or perhaps from my imperfect manner of conveying myself,

I can't say, but I was sorry to find a sort of indifference to these very important matters."

The fact was, Sir Welbore, at the first opportunity, had tried to let off some of these political economy petards upon her, and she had said, with her natural truth and candour, "Indeed, Sir Welbore, I can't follow you ; we shall soon get into a regular fog." Sir Welbore withdrew, hurt and a little confounded.

"Dear me," said Jenny, opening her eyes ; "*dear me !* and yet how she has studied, our dear Charlotte. She is *so* clever, Sir ; such a mind—quite a man's head. My poor little brain beside hers indeed ! She has read all the terrible books—Locke and Aaron Smith, and——"

"H'm — beg your pardon — Adam — Adam Smith." She had unwittingly trod upon one of his mental corns, and he winced, yet the stately correction was like a salve, so he was pleased at the same time. "You mean the author of the 'Wealth of Nations ?' "

"Dear me, I am *so* stupid," said Jenny. "Oh, Sir, forgive me."

"But I had no idea," said Sir Welbore, looking stiffly over at Charlotte, "that my—that Charlotte was so deeply read in these matters. I thing you misapprehend. She led me to believe that——"

"She is *so* clever," said Jenny, in her devout way. "Look at her library. She has rows of those wonderful books, all marked and noted in pencil. She has wonderful genius and talent and cleverness, dear Charlotte, more than many men, Sir, I assure you."

Sir Welbore looked distrustfully over at Charlotte, now very busy with her true knight. He rather represented all the new theories of "women's work," female

law copying, and such like ; but in Charlotte's instance he considered himself a little aggrieved, as though some deception had been put upon him.

Before the night was over he spoke in very flattering terms of the young person who had sat beside him at dinner. "A most suitable person," he said to Mr. Franklyn, though for what suitable he did not mention. And Mr. Franklyn taking up the text, went more fully into the history of Jenny's list of self-sacrifices, which Sir Welbore considered "very proper conduct indeed—does her great credit."

Jenny, whose eyes were always busy travelling round the table in a downcast, imploring way, at one time surprised the faces of the lovers turned directly towards her. Their faces were as promptly turned away, as it were, on being discovered. "Ah !" thought Jenny, "they are talking of me—poor me." They were talking of her. Young Craven was asking about her, as he had asked about any new faces at the table. He said he disliked her face more than he could say. There was something to him most disagreeable—something *stealthy*, which he could not endure. Perhaps he did the poor creature injustice. And so she was the one who was near being in *their* family ("our" family, said young Craven, with meaning, and the sensible girl gave a tranquil blush), and who had made such a grand sacrifice? Well, it might be so, but still (and young Craven looked hard at Jenny) he did not like her—a dangerous creature, depend upon it.

Jenny caught this expression of dislike, and dropped her eyes at once in a shrinking, deprecating way. "Our dear Charlotte," she said to herself, "is telling him

about poor me. It is very odd how our dear Charlotte dislikes me. No matter—no matter.”

Later that evening, when all were in the drawing-room, Mr. Franklyn went over to Jenny, who was sitting modestly apart, looking over some of the dear old music. (What chords were touched at every incident of that night—the old house at home, the familiar furniture, &c.) Jenny said many times, to many different persons, that she felt as it were in a dream. Mr. Franklyn came over to her, and to him she said it was *exactly* like a dream. The old place, the old chair, the old faces, &c.

And Mr. Franklyn, who had been just speaking of her to Sir Welbore, was really pleased with her grateful nature, and spoke very kindly to her of her prospects and life, and of how she was getting on at the Maxwells’.

Presently came up young Craven. “We are looking for a music book,” he said. “Charlotte is going to favour the company. It should be here on this chair. Could I disturb you a moment, Miss—Bell? Thank you.”

Jenny had glided off her chair in a second — had shrunk away with a sweetly resigned look and drooping eyes. Young Craven spoke in a blunt way. He stooped down and looked on the ground. “Very sorry, indeed,” he said, “but this book *must* be here.”

“By the way, Welbore,” said Mr. Franklyn, “I believe you have not been introduced to Miss——”

Young Craven, busy tumbling the books over, looked up a little surly from his work.

“No,” he said, bluntly; “these forms are scarcely

necessary here. Everyone knows everybody in this house."

Jenny, scarcely daring to lift her eyes to him: "I seem to know you many years—so many years! I have heard of you so much—it seems like an old friend."

Young Craven gave something like a laugh, and said again, "Beg your pardon! This is not the book yet; sorry to disturb you, but Charlotte is waiting."

Jenny fetched a gentle sigh, then said, "I could help you, I'm sure; I know every song in these dear old books. Dearest Charlotte and I used to——"

"Got it at last, for a wonder," said young Craven, bounding, and leaving Jenny and her sentence abruptly.

"Used to play them over and over again," continued Jenny, adroitly, as though she had been relating the little incident to Mr. Franklyn. "Ah, dear me! how the old days come back upon me!"

Jenny's heart was sorely wrung by this behaviour of her friend's betrothed. He dislikes me, she thought. Some friend has been setting him against me. But she made a resolution of propitiating him by gentleness, and opposing to his prejudice a steady and unvarying sweetness. Later that night, Mr. Franklyn, who was determined to pay her all fitting attention, called to young Craven, "Will you get Miss Bell some wine and water?" Young Craven did as he was bid, ungraciously enough—that is to say, as promptly as the office could with decency be got through. He had to wait by her until she had finished. Jenny sipped her wine leisurely, and pitching her voice in her lowest key, kept him prisoner by a series of little questions, chiefly concerning "dearest Charlotte." She was so even, so

equable, so steady, so calm, and so sweet; that was the only term—insipid and vapid as it was—that *would* express Charlotte. He would be very happy—oh, so happy—winning *such* a treasure. He might trust *her*. She knew Charlotte well. And Jenny sipped her wine leisurely, and looked radiant as she dwelt on her friend's merits.

But it would not do. That dull insensible young Craven drummed with his fingers on the table, and spoke a few formularies of conventional assent, all the while looking first over at one quarter, and then measuring Jenny's tumbler with distrustful impatient eyes.

"You live down at Craven," Jenny said, looking earnestly at her tumbler, as though she were looking for marine objects. "I hear it is lovely—*lovely*!" (Where had Jenny picked up this assurance?) "Not one of your new places, but venerable. *I* shall never see it, but dearest Charlotte will. Describe it all to me—do," continued Jenny, suppliantly, if not too much trouble. Give me a little sketch of it—Charlotte's future home. You can photograph well—well, I am sure. *I know you can.*"

Young Craven lifted his eyes from Jenny's tumbler and laughed loudly, almost rudely. "A good notion," he said; "beastly process—stain your fingers. Catch me at that sort of work. No, no!"

"I mean," said Jenny, with a little tremor, "description—verbal description, which I am sure—that is, I know, you can do it in the most life-like, graphic way possible. To-day at dinner, though I was a long way off, I heard, that is——"

"There's my father going to bed. Beg pardon, but

must go now. More wine? Excuse me," and young Craik shot away, abruptly leaving Jenny standing, and in the midst of her little narrative. She smiled after him and sighed. I dare say she set him down as ever so little boorish; but he was of the country. He was, besides, Charlotte's *futur*.

No doubt she thought, too, within herself, "How he dislikes me! What have I done—the little exile who wishes well to all men and women, and is too humble not to be on sweet terms with mankind?" Perhaps some one had set him against her. "But really," thought Jenny, or must have thought Jenny, "it amounts to a marked, pointed dislike." Still good humour, sweetness, gentleness, would do much to remove this prejudice, and these arms only was one in her lonely position entitled to employ.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LITTLE EXILE'S "GAME."

JENNY had a certain pride of her own. She had made these little advances for the sake of her old friend and playmate of early years ; but she felt it would be unwomanly to do more. Young Craven was late the next morning at breakfast—rather had been out ranging the hills—and by a curious accident, the only gap or vacancy at table was to be found next Jenny. He drew in his chair with a sort of impatience, and a wry look, but half concealed. The Bishop was next him on the other side ; and though he disliked that prelate, and "chaffed" him secretly, and even in a sly manner to his face, he turned towards him and became eagerly interested in the Dissenters and the "wonderful organisation" of the great missionary society.

But the Bishop, who was always chary of his ammunition, and kept his conversational theories "in store," as it were, not to be wasted on mere camp-followers and volunteers, did not enter eagerly on his favourite subjects. He was busy, too, with muffins, which he was cutting down fiercely, crosswise, as he would, morally speaking, and with the blade of controversy, a toasted Dissenter.

But Jenny did not seize the opportunity, as he had imagined. He was determined to be churlish if she should dare to address him—to "shut her up" curtly. It would be a useful hint for her future demeanour. But,

Strange to say, Jenny seemed to shrink away from him with a sort of a hint of a cowering glance. Once, indeed, she ventured to speak with him—to ask him if he would be so kind as to—to—to hand her the——

"Beg pardon. What?" he said.

"The cream—er; no, I mean the butter," said Jenny, in great confusion, and looking as though she expected to receive a blow.

Young Craven saw this, and laughed inwardly. He was pleased at having this awe-inspiring power. "She won't come teasing me again," he thought. "She will keep in her proper place."

"Why did you ask that curious thing down," he said to Charlotte, "when I was here, at least? Something coarse about her, I can't get on with her at all."

"It was papa wished to have her here," said the sensible girl, "he pities her condition so."

"I can't bear her manner," he went on, "it is so—so—creeping. And yet, she has good looks of her own. —She would make a good flashy lady's-maid."

Jenny, with natural delicacy, took the rough hints given to her, and kept in retirement. Sir Welbore patronised her, and at his feet she drank in the waters of wisdom and the Welborian political economy. But young Craven she avoided, but not conspicuously. Mr. Franklyn, at dinner, one day, was about bidding young Craven "take in" Miss Bell; but Jenny with a hurried start caught him just in time, and said in a whisper, "Oh! no—no—no!" She was sitting next Mr. Franklyn afterwards, and she told him softly, that he must have thought her "so odd." But she—that is, persons in her dependent position were so unfortunate—sometimes they

inspired dislikes, repulsions—perhaps well deserved—her case she knew it *was* so ; but the fact was, young Mr. Craven had taken a *dreadful* dislike to her—in fact, hated her. This was all in confidence—not a word to be breathed—as he, Mr. Franklyn, was her friend and benefactor. But, on the whole, she was most unfortunate—most unhappy—most miserable ; and Jenny seemed that she could then and there have cried heartily, but for the publicity.

Mr. Franklyn was confused, and puzzled, and grieved. He really liked Jenny—(all elderly gentlemen liked Jenny)—and he thought of speaking to young Craven. However, he told what Jenny had told him to one of the younger girls, and said he feared poor Jenny was very uncomfortable ; and that it was a pity ; and that here was her little time of pleasure all turned into bitterness. She was in a very helpless, dependent position, and it was very unfortunate, on the whole.

The younger girls were a little touched at this picture—grew suddenly very kind and tender to her—and even told young Craven, and said it was a shame for him. He laughed, but laughed complacently—he inspired such dreadful terror by the awful majesty of his demeanour. He was pleased at the notion. “What nonsense,” he said. What did he care about the girl, only he did not want to be persecuted.

Jenny certainly was not persecuting him. That very day he spoke to her good-naturedly, but with patronage ; but she, receiving it gratefully, and almost abjectly, still continued shy. She told the girls, who told him again, that somehow she always felt a tremor when Mr. Craven came into the room. It was the most absurd, ridiculous

hing in the world, and she could laugh at herself. But her nerves were shaken, and latterly she had gone through a good deal of trial. And the girls, though boisterous naturally, suddenly recollected their brother's foolish adventure, and became grave and full of pity. Then there came universal kissing, and Jenny's plump cheeks had to bear many of these tokens of affection.

Full of tenderness they tell all to young Craven. "Now, Charles," they say, "you *must* try and be good-natured to her—poor thing. You know her dependent situation," &c. "Good gracious," Charles burst out; "what have I done to her? Why, if anything, *she* stands off from me. She shrinks away as if I was going to eat her. I am not this rough sort of ogre that murders young women for breakfast, am I? Someway she—I don't know what to call it—slides off, when I even say good-morning to her."

"Ah, that's it," says the younger girl, "she's afraid. She says there's something in your face so like the old Roman busts—of Plato, I think—so cold and chilling. I don't see it, but—*she* does."

"Gammon—nonsense," said he, laughing loud; "what a little humbug she is!" But humbug or no, he was pleased. Hitherto he had always been complimented on his rude physical gifts—his shooting, hunting, and the mere savage accomplishments. But he thirsted for praise for gifts which he had not—the more intellectual line—in which, to say the truth, he was sadly deficient. This "humbug," then, came welcome.

They were going out to walk—the two girls and Charles. Charlotte was to take a state airing in the carriage with her new mamma, an office which, it is to be

suspected, she would not have selected, but which, being part of her duty, she accepted with cheerfulness. Jenny was helping her in some little balancing of accounts, a department in which she was always useful. On the walk, the girls, who, like all young people, were subject to silent turns and revulsions of feeling, entertained their companion with the whole story of their brother's and Jenny's little affair, with all minute details; giving all the dramatic business and colouring. They took the tale out of each other's mouth as they went along, and grew quite sympathetic over the incidents of the going away and the return. He had heard a meagre outline before—had picked up allusions and scraps at the family-table but had never received it in this epic shape. He was rather interested—put some questions and said, at the end, it was very interesting—like a story, by Jove! Then they told him, with laughter, of her lover—of the curate, Wells—and the poor man's suffering, and how they were longing to make a match of it, and "what fun" it would be. They were all plotting, they said, to bring it about; and papa would get the Bishop to do something for him, and they would make a very pleasant pair. Young Craven said it would be good fun for them all to join and make the fellow speak out.

That evening he came up several times to Jenny, with as much graciousness as he could put on, asked her how she spent the day, and in the hope of avoiding the terrible Roman bust expression, tried to expand his honest face into an almost imbecile cast of meaning. Jenny expressed (by looks) the most intense gratitude—it was too great kindness for such as her, the little exile—human

kindness always affected her — she didn't expect —.

But in speech she kept reserved, and in a second shot away over to the "dear girls," leaving young Craven a little amazed and a little provoked. "What airs this creature is giving herself!" he said to himself. "Really, when one takes the trouble to conciliate —" He thought of the Roman bust expression again, and smiled. "What *could* she be afraid of?"

It will be seen how curiously things had come about in our Jenny's favour. Though not of the society, and odious, as she conceived, to one member, still she had come to be part of the dramatic elements of the scene, and was actually food for the thoughts and speech of many of the actors. It was something for a poor outcast to reach even to this in such a company.

It has been mentioned, that young Craven's weakness — rather one of his weaknesses — lay in struggling out of his own special accomplishments, where he shone, into every other walk, where there was no probability of his shining. He was a noble savage — could read, that is to say, for ten minutes, but then got tired; and could write short, plain letters in an indifferent hand. But he pined to be thought clever, and actually wrote verses in secret. Like most of your rough, strong, country fellows, he was more or less "soft," and had a sentimental corner to which he often retired. He actually wrote verses — tender, languishing, feeble stanzas, which appeared in an honoured place in the *Dorkingshire Conservative* (Sir Welbore's politics), with the initials, C. W. C. It was whispered about whose property these letters were; indeed, young Craven told the secret, with mystery, to every person who furnished a suitable opening for bring-

ing in the subject. He had a half-dozen or so of these outpourings written to "Ianthé," to "Juanita," to "Elvira," to "Zitella," and to other romantic beings, whose names he had heard in plays, or seen in the music-books.

One morning, when the post-bag came in at breakfast-time, and Sir Welbore was turning over his letters, with a sort of over tasked cabinet minister air, he handed over two newspapers to his son. They were two copies of the *Dorkingshire Conservative*; and it was noted, that the youth opened them with a sort of bashful foolish air uncommon with him, and at the same time with great flutter and eagerness. It came out after breakfast. It was the longest effort his genius had yet soared to. It was a poem "To MEDORA," which, bursting the modest limits of the "Poet's Corner" of that journal, had spread like an inundation down three quarters of a column. It was in blank verse (the feet very imperfectly calculated), and was signed with the familiar letters, "C. W. C." He was bursting to show his labour, and got the three girls together in the garden summer-house to listen while he read. The two younger, sadly untrained, listened, wondering. They would have laughed, but young Craven was serious—too serious. It began—

"Medora! loveliest flower, where'er thou art!
Sweetest!—who dwells," &c.

He read it twice through, and then collected the voices. The younger ones said it was fine—very fine—as they conscientiously supposed it must be. The sensible girl said it was very fair—very good, indeed.

"But don't you like it?—isn't it the best thing I have done? Come!"

"The best thing you have done?"

"Yes—it is far better than the 'Ianthé'—isn't it?"

"Well," said the sensible girl, smiling, "as you do put it to me, I like the little short pieces better. I think blank verse is scarcely your line. You may call me Miss Candour if you like."

"Well, I must say," said the youth, bridling a little, "I can't see how you got at that. I know the editor said I had made 'a gigantic stride'—those were his very words."

"My dear Charles," says the sensible girl, laughing, "exactly. No one can make a more gigantic stride than you on *terra firma*. Keep to it, my dear Charles. This blank verse making never answers, even in the most skilful hands. Gigantic strides! What a funny editor—ha! ha! Not but that is *very* good—wonderful for you—it really is very good," added the sensible girl, hastily.

Young Craven was colouring pretty hard. He took back his paper, and crushed it up to put it in his pocket.

"I was sure you would have liked it," he said, with deeply wounded tone—"for Medora was partly taken from——"

"Oh, how nice—how kind of you!" said the sensible girl warmly. Though she was one of the truthful, candid people, she was more conscious than they are of the ungraciousness of speaking the plain truth—only she knew not how to take off the unpleasantness. She would have been grateful to be shown the way. But his

withers had been sorely wrung. Yet all would have healed in an hour; but just at that moment Jenny is seen passing by among the trees, pensively pulling flowers.

"I think you will allow the editor to be a man of judgment. It is one of the best-conducted papers in England. He is considered, I know—— Hallo! there is Miss Jenny. I wonder is she a judge of poetry. By Jove! I should like to——"

The girls, too young to know the significance of what they were about to do, started up and cried, "Oh, read it for Jenny—read it for Jenny;" and without a second's delay called out, "Jenny, Jenny."

Jenny stopped, in the act of pulling a flower, amazed—affrighted. The colour rose slowly in Charlotte's cheeks. Jenny looked round—hesitated—then moved swiftly away. The two girls started off in pursuit. "She *must* hear Charles's poem," they said.

Charlotte looked as though she suffered, but she was too proud to say a word. The youth was thinking complacently of the pleasure of reading it a third time aloud, and said nothing. Jenny was presently brought in, struggling almost, and in custody. She was almost scared.

"You foolish children," she said, "what did you do this for? Mr. Craven here, and dear Charlotte—oh!"

"You must hear it, Jenny," said the girls. "Oh, such a beautiful poem as Charles has written!"

Jenny's face lighted up as with a flash. "

"A poem," she said, with enthusiasm, as though the news were too good to be true. "A poem—Mr. Craven's!"

"Written all by himself," said the girls together. "You wouldn't believe it."

This, though a little uncomplimentary, was still genuine praise. Jenny shook her head sadly. *She* knew the marvellous power latent, perhaps undeveloped, behind the *os frontis* of the Roman bust; she could believe much. Young Craven looked bashful, and fingered his newspaper. He was burning to begin.

"It is only some ridiculous rhymes," he said. "I am ashamed of them, and you must promise me not to laugh. Charlotte here says they are very bad. I dare say she is right."

Jenny gave a start.

"Very bad!" she said; then checked herself. "Oh, Charlotte is a great judge; she is so clever; has read such a deal. Haven't you, Charlotte dear?"

Charlotte still suffering, answered coldly—

"I said they were very good—very excellent, indeed. I am no judge, as you know—only——"

"Oh," said Jenny, in a lowly way, "if it would not be *too* much trouble, *would* you—that is, if you *would* be so kind—just to read—just a little—a few lines."

Then after many "It's really not worth," "'Pon my word, it's the greatest stuff you ever," &c., the youth began—

TO MEDORA.

"Medora! loveliest flower! where'er thou art,
Sweetest!" &c.

Who shall describe Jenny's delight—real, unaffected delight—during the recital of this performance? Her sympathetic countenance expressed all the hopes and passions of the poet. She marked the time, as it were,

by little gasps and spasms of intense enjoyment. She looked from one of the girls' faces to the other in speechless rapture. Young Craven felt this encouragement, and pursued his task with fresh fire. He got to the end with immense spirit—was proud of himself. Charlotte looked at Jenny's honest enthusiasm with a curling lip and strange disgust. She was naturally of the "lymphatic" temperament, and was not easily stirred. She said nothing.

"You like it?" said young Craven, folding up his paper.

"Oh—oh—oh!" said Jenny three times, half closing her eyes, "charming, charming!" Her eyes fell on Charlotte's look of scorn. "That is—I'm not a regular judge. But I *like* it—oh, I do so like it! It is all I can say."

"Well, that is very high praise. It is fair, I think, for a beginner. I assure you, a very experienced literary man" (Ed. of *Dorkingshire Conservative*) spoke very highly of it. Of course, he might be prejudiced. Charlotte doesn't like it—no, Charlotte austere-ly condemns."

Jenny heard this statement with amazement. Charlotte, too proud, still said nothing. Her sister spoke for her.

"Indeed, Charles, she liked it. Charlotte never says what she feels."

They at last had an instinct that something was wrong. But their youthful minds did not see that this attempt at justification was suggesting to him that there was something to be justified, and only magnifying a trifle.

"Not like it!" said Jenny, grieved, as ~~it~~ were. "Not

like it! Oh, I know nothing of the rules," she went on, smiling. "I am one of the vulgar crowd, and it pleases me. But Charlotte is so clever, and has learnt all the rules."

Charlotte looked at her, scared, as it were. She had instinct of what Jenny was about, but seemed to be afraid to think it possible. Young Craven, now in good humour again, had rolled up his precious paper.

"Never mind," he said, "it is not worth talking about. I am a wretched rhymist, and shan't take to it as a profession, I assure you. Don't be afraid, Charlotte, I shan't discredit our establishment."

"Still," said Jenny, with hesitation, "it is so nice, so charming to *be able* to turn a few lines, elegantly, if you wish. Oh, I would give, give worlds!" added she, clasping her hands, "in the lonely solitude of my little room, to be able to do so. How I envy those who have the gift to do so! Don't you, dearest Charlotte?"

Charlotte, still scared, said it was very pleasant—that is——

"Ah," said young Craven, "nothing under Milton for Charlotte—the best sort or none. Come now, let us get in to lunch. A race, girls—fifty yards' start for you." And the three shot away.

The two women, left suddenly behind at the door of the summer-house, looked suddenly in each other's face. Our Jenny's cheeks had a fine fresh colour, and her fine eyes sparkled; the other was pale.

"I am not going in to lunch, dear," said Jenny. "I must get some more flowers. You will go, of course, and join that happy circle. Dear me, what a happy

lot before you ! You remember, in the 'Speaker,' at school, 'Happy, happy, happy pair. None but the brave,' &c. He *is* brave. By the way, you won't be angry, darling, if I give you one *little* bit of advice, You *know* I mean well ; but it *just* occurred to me. May I ? ”

Charlotte, with her eyes still fixed on her, said abruptly, “What have you to tell me ? ”

“You should praise his poetry — in fact, everything he does. Men expect it. *I* was genuine, because I really *did* like it. Oh ! they were lovely, beautiful verses. It really surprises me,” added Jenny, musingly, “*how* you did not like them. Quite right, though, to tell the truth.”

There was a strange air of independence in the way Jenny spoke, together with a tone of mocking good-humour quite unusual with her. The other remarked it, and seemed confounded.

“I must go in,” she said, slowly.

“Ah ! yes,” said Jenny, “I am detaining you. Good-bye, darling. You are not angry ? People in situation are always privileged. Do you know,” added Jenny, in a half-whisper, “I think him charming—so gay, so natural. Oh ! you *will* be so happy ! ”

And with a little pert toss of her head, Jenny moved away, singing. The other, as it were dreaming, looked after her long ; then suddenly seemed to wake up. A quiet, resolved expression came into her, with one of her old calm smiles. She walked away thoughtfully, but with a firm step. At the end of the walk she looked back an instant at Jenny, who was stooping, pulling flowers. A little, light waggoner's straw hat

decorated Jenny's head. No doubt she was singing at her task. A strange look of quiet scorn came into Charlotte's face; it was half defiance. She had picked up Jenny's glove. It was open battle, with pointed spears. No quarter.

But they were not done with the luckless address "To Medora," as yet. Two days afterwards a stupid housemaid, in distress for fuel, found the *Dorkingshire Conservative* drifting about as part of the flotsam and jetsam of the drawing-room. It had served its turn—local journals were not considered precious—and she did not know of the splendid treasure it contained. Accordingly, "Medora" was resolved into wreaths of curling smoke, and floated gently up the dining-room chimney. Before long the youth had missed his treasure and there was terrible huc-and-cry through the house. It could not be found; and housemaid knew not, or declined to disclose, what she had done. The youth grew moody. The loss might be irretrievable, for local journals are not kept in stock. Suddenly he remembered there were two copies. What had become of the second *Conservative*? Fresh huc and cry. Up stairs, down stairs, and even in my lady's chamber; when, lo, the youth's own hand delves out from among the music in the drawing-room the lost journal. We are saved: there is great joy. But in the very heart of the *Conservative* is a long narrow gap, like the embrasure of a tower, clearly done with a pair of scissors. The precious rhymes "To Medora" had been feloniously cut out!

The family were out, scattered about. The youth, in a great fume, inquired of servants—of everybody—but

was not displeased. Jenny was in her room, in retreat, working or braiding flowers for the waggoner's straw hat, or, it might be, praying. A maid came to tell her of the outrage, and presently Jenny entered into the drawing-room where the youth was looking vacantly through the window in his newspaper. Jenny penitent—morally speaking, with her hair dishevelled and the white sheet of Jane Shore on—she would have fallen at the youth's feet. She had been very wrong. She had no right to do so—none in the world. But where there were *two* copies she thought—no harm—*indeed*, meant no harm. In fact, she alone was guilty, and there—*there* (in trembling fingers) was the poem, cut out from the *Conservative's* bosom with Jenny's own little scissors—there—there.

Young Craven raised her (morally speaking), and, really flattered by this genuine unaffected homage to his work, glowed all over as he conveyed his acknowledgments. Harm! there was none in the world. He felt it really as a great compliment that she should appreciate his little verses. "Some of these days," continued young Craven, with an air of wise thought, "I mean to collect my little trifles into a small volume. Some literary people of judgment" (*i.e.* Ed. of *Dork. Cons.*) "have strongly advised me to this step. You shall certainly have an early copy, that is, if you will honour me by giving it a place among your books."

Jenny, overwhelmed by this favour, faltered out her acknowledgments. Wheels were heard on the gravel outside.

"Here they are," she said hurriedly, "I must go. I have letters to write;" and she fluttered away to her room again.

Why *must* she go? He was confused and pleased. "What an enthusiast she is!" he said half aloud; "and yet I like these natural characters; something Italian—something Spanish about her." Then he thought of Charlotte, who had *not* privily cut them out to paste in her album, and ceased to smile.

At dinner that day the sensible girl, who had become of a sudden much more earnest in her attentions to him, and almost forced in her manner (which did not suit her,) said suddenly, "Well, Charles; no news of the verses. They have ransacked the house from top to bottom."

"Oh! they were found," he said, carelessly.

"Found," she said, lighting up; "I am *so* glad! And where?"

"Oh! in the drawing-room, I believe, among the music." He looked over furtively at Jenny, who was looking over furtively too, but dropped her eyelids the next second. Charlotte saw it—not only saw, but understood the whole incident, as though it had been told her on the spot. There was a secret, or at least a tacit understanding, between them. The sensible girl turned pale again. Jenny was scoring rapidly.

CHAPTER XX.

JENNY'S MORNING.

THOUGH somewhat distracted by his company, Jenny noticed that Mr. Franklyn used to retire, as of old, to his study,—going down the mine, as it were, very late of nights, to shovel among his papers. He was getting the old, anxious look back again—sadly worn about the checks—for business had been drawing in closer about him. Sir Welbore had announced to him one morning, in stately way (as from the ministerial benches):—"Mr. Franklyn, I have heard from Mr. Hodge—my solicitor, Mr. Hodge. He expects to be here on Thursday next. Hum—and so—hum—I dare say you will find it convenient to have everything ready for him." Mr. Franklyn said yes; he hoped so—in fact, he was quite sure so—and would send for Mr. Crowle at once. Jenny was by, in a corner, working embroidery—cutting out—with such a general mouse-like demeanour, that they virtually considered her absent. She was too lowly to listen.

Jenny, however, knew that this referred to darling Charlotte's fortune, which Mr. Franklyn was to find. For the great horse of Craven, though abounding in wealth, considered it only due to its magnificence to have a proportionate sum laid at its door, by the family who was shortly to be allied to it. "It would not do to have it go forth that a mere pauper was coming into the House, "in her smock," as our coarse old ancestors would put it. And so stately Sir Welbore, rising in his place on

the Treasury benches, said, "Mr. Franklyn, we shall say seven thousand pounds, if you please." And Mr. Franklyn said, With all his heart; that is, with all his heavy heart.

It was laid on the back of his young man of business, Mr. Crowle; and for some weeks it was believed that he had been striving in the market to get together this sum on the security of the estate, which seemed doubtful enough, for it was pasted over and over again with layers of mortgages, like an old dead wall. He went out every day, like a shipwrecked mariner on an island, ascending the rock, and came back with dismal accounts. Still there was hope. But now—the evening before Sir Welbore made his financial statement from the Treasury bench, he had written from London to say there was hope—more in his next. Which news produced a little exultation and fluttering hope; for it was likely that the dead wall would bear another mortgage poster.

That morning, with the general Grey Forest postal delivery, came a letter for Jenny, from Mr. Maxwell, the first she had received. In the quiet retirement of her own chamber she read it. It ran:—

"Chesterfield Street.

"DEAR MISS BELL,

"I hope your health is now quite restored, and that the air of Grey Forest has done you good. I am afraid I am more selfish in this wish than you imagine. You are wanted back here sadly; and, I must tell you the plain truth, we cannot get on without you. The house is in disorder; the poor children can do nothing, and their mother, who, I am sorry to say, did not know

who was her secret and unseen friend, now begins to miss many of those little cares and attentions which we cannot supply to her. For myself, I am getting helpless again—eyes showing signs of revolt—in short, I want my faithful secretary again.

“This is the very effrontery of selfishness; but what can I do? Still you must not think of stirring, unless you are quite—*more* than restored. Only please mention some period about which we may look for you.

“Your sincere Friend,

“FREDERICK MAXWELL.

“P.S.—I may mention, lest you should be thinking of that little unpleasantness to which I *fancied* you alluded, before you left us, that I have taken steps to have things put on a proper footing.

“Forgive me. But may we say some day next week? Suppose Monday? Even now I feel that those vile labourers of mine are about striking work.”

Jenny smiled a little as she read; but the next moment her bright forehead contracted. Was she thinking how awkwardly this came—just in the middle of this little excitement—possibly, too, in the middle of some plans that had been working in her little head? This was an invitation that could scarcely be well resisted; and so she must the next week. The obvious course for Jenny was to crowd together all her little enjoyments, and whatever little prospectus she was turning over in her mind. And it did seem as though some one had whispered this *projet* to Jenny, for she left her chamber with a steady step, and a smile of confidence on her rosy lips.

Mr. Franklyn had grown very kind, and almost affectionate, to Jenny of late—since he fancied she was finding herself uncomfortable among them. He used to speak softly and graciously to her, as it were to encourage her, by way of counterpoise to any little prejudice the younger people might have against her. And

on this morning, when they were gone out, and Jenny was sitting quietly in the drawing-room, within the shadow of the great Sir Welbore's broad *Times* sheet, Mr. Franklyn came in, rubbing his head, in a troubled, questioning way, and said, "Jenny, I am going to try and get these papers into order. Will you come and help me, and make a day of it?"

Jenny rose at once, with a look towards Sir Welbore of gentle suffering (the gold-rims of the double eye-glass were scanning her, over the *Times*), and floated away to the door. "Ah! hum," said Sir Welbore; "quite a sort of secretary, I declare." The girls and young Craven had talked of a party to their island, some time after lunch. She did not care for their sports. Besides, they would not want her; would not miss her, perhaps.

A wretched man of business—wretched at accounts—at arrangement—at seeing his way generally; and yet always groping, and ferreting, and shovelling, and "getting things settled," which meant frightful disorganisation. He was turning over tin boxes, emptying them, as into a gigantic dust-bin. He might have had a train of carts at the door to cart away all the stoddy or silt; and still he was always settling. He had a genius for this sort of disorganisation.

Gentle Jenny sighed as she surveyed the *débris*. It

was as though wreckers had got in. A safe, standing wide open,—boxes spilled,—and a round table to the left, over-balanced by the load of old law-papers, on its side on the ground, having come down in the night with a crash. Poor man! He had thought to have everything orderly by Sir Welbore's coming.

Jenny, after her plaintive way, soon struck out a plan. She was for action. She proposed they should do the sorting together, and that they should eliminate a good worthless proportion from the mass by wholesale destruction, tearing up, &c. Of such sort were old tradesmen's bills, circulars, pamphlets, tracts—for there was a varied assortment. And very shortly Jenny was standing up to her knees in a heap of paper shreds. She was a brave workwoman.

She found a little entertainment, too, in the matter. She whetted her woman's curiosity as she went along, taking quick, short glances at this and that paper, some of which set her wondering. She lightened the work for Mr. Franklyn by talking cheerfully, and getting him to talk about various private matters. He found a great relief in this sort of communion, and gradually, as he found himself better by the intercourse, spoke with her about this and that little matter according as a paper, a bill, or application turning up out of the heap suggested the subject. This community of work makes people strangely confidential. Jenny gave wise, sagacious replies—not very profound truly, but practical: at least they pointed to one distinct course to him, poor soul. Tossing between many, it was welcome, as something distinct and certain.

"I wish," he said at last, when they had already made

surprising progress,—“I wish I had known of you before—that is, that you were so clever and useful.”

“But,” said Jenny, “dear Sir, you would never—if you recollect—let me—that is——”

“Because,” he said, “I never know—I never thought. Perhaps, after all, if Charles *had*—but no matter now. I ought to be able to do these things. I was brought up to business. But someway there has so much come together upon my poor head of late, all at once, that——”

Some one tapped at the door.

“The steward, Sir,” said the servant, “wants to see you particular.”

“Yes, yes,” said he wearily, and moved mechanically to the door.

But Jenny jumped up, with something like a half shriek—“Oh, Sir, Sir, you won’t leave me here. Oh, I dare not! Indeed, it is impossible. All these precious documents——”

Mr. Franklyn smiled. “Ah, Jenny,” he said, “I would trust you with—with—no matter, it will do another time. This is my life, you see. Always at call for this, that, and the other. A sort of gentleman-waiter, wanted by every one. No one to confide in—to help me—to advise me. The poor girls, what can *they* do? There is this business of Charlotte’s money. Crowle says it will all go smooth; but I have a presentiment that we shall not get it. Nothing goes smooth with me—never did. God help me!”

He sat down in a chair, and passed his hands nervously over his forehead. He had quite given way of a sudden. Jenny had never seen him so before, but she said not a

word either of comfort or consolation, but went on with her work. Mr. Franklyn seemed to find a sort of relief in finding some one to confide his wretchedness to.

"And poor Charlotte," he went on—"my true, faithful, working, unselfish Charlotte—if anything *should*—goodness!—I think, Jenny, I should die. The disgrace, the mortification, before those cold, proud people. I think—I think I never *could* get over it. More for *her* sake; for I am getting very used to blows and the degradations of debt. Poor, darling Charlotte! No one knows what a comfort she has been to me."

"Dear me! dear me!" said Jenny, "how surprising! I thought all was arranged quite smooth; and that Charlotte was to be so happy. How odd, I am sure—they all think so—at least, Sir Welbore——"

"Hush, Jenny," said Mr. Franklyn, looking round nervously—"exactly, exactly."

Jenny, very busy now tearing the papers vigorously, with her back to Mr. Franklyn, was calmly smiling to herself. She was no hypocrite, and she did not love Charlotte *very* much; so her most honest course was to remain silent.

Mr. Franklyn went on: "If you were to know, Jenny, what I have suffered since you left us. No one knows it. But to be fighting off disgrace and exposure with all sorts of shifts, and even tricks—to be walking through our county pointed at as an embarrassed man, who has just escaped arrest by some ingenious trick, thought of by Crowle; and our family as good—better than the rest of them—so proud. Oh, Jenny, Jenny, there is only one knows what I suffer—poor Charlotte. And yet she unconsciously *makes* me suffer more than anything."

Jenny said something now—but still coldly enough—

"You shouldn't take these gloomy views, Sir. This affair will go well enough, you'll see. Mr. Crowle will be back—when, Sir?"

"To-morrow evening," said he, with a smile—a very wan smile; "we shall be out of suspense by that time. Even he, Crowle, I don't think is the same to us latterly—(nobody is the same to us latterly). He has heard something, or somebody has told him something."

"Told him something!" said Jenny. "Oh, impossible, Sir!"

Jenny, being utterly ignorant of all the facts, was scarcely entitled to pronounce as to the possibility or impossibility, but Mr. Franklyn understood her.

"Some foolish joke which these poor thoughtless children played upon him. It has hurt his sensibility. I don't know, I'm sure."

"Oh, I am confident, I am certain"—almost enthusiastically—"this is some mistake. Dear Charlotte, so steady, so quiet, so sensible, she wouldn't——"

"Ah, exactly," said he, "just what I would have supposed. Yet, some way, I think, he has got to dislike Charlotte, and before you would actually almost say he seemed to have a sort of partiality for her."

Jenny grew thoughtful on this, and smiled down upon a bundle of papers.

"But he is a little changed. We are not the same as another family," continued he; "we are an unlucky generation. Even there's my cousin, John Hall, who lives at Dieppe, a wealthy man (we have all his papers here somewhere)—even he, an old bachelor, and we, his only relations, have nothing to expect from him. He has almost told me as much. We are different from other

people, my dear Jenny, and always will be. And to tell you the truth, I wish the struggle was over, for I am, indeed, getting very tired."

He looked very tired, that poor, worn, wan creature, who had been battling now so many years.

"These," said Jenny, holding a loose bundle of law parchments, "what is to be done with these—they look new?"

Mr. Franklyn had lighted on letters or papers of his own, and scarcely heard her. Jenny looked up, and seeing him engaged, looked at this bundle again, and answered her own question for herself. They were new clean deeds, labelled outside "INDENTURE OF MORTGAGE," but there were blanks whereon the names should have been. Jenny having a sharp instinct, at once saw the true conclusion, that this was an "arrangement" which, like very many of the Franklyn arrangements, had proved abortive. So when Mr. Franklyn came back into the world once more, and asked, "What did you say, Jenny?" they were out of her hand, and buried under a heap of paper lumber.

After an hour's more work, "Now go, Jenny," said he. "You must be tired, and I am getting very selfish. Now go and get some fresh air."

Jenny did not want fresh air—would have laboured cheerfully in that vineyard for weeks, if necessary. To say the truth, she found it rather a piquant occupation, and used to dip now and again into letters, to see if they were of value and worth preserving. But at Mr. Franklyn's almost stern, peremptory bidding she stole away quietly, and passed through the drawing-room, to get her bonnet. She was a little heated with stooping,

and looked really brilliant. She was going to the garden to get a few flowers. She would soon be shut up in the grim wilderness of London, poor child !

Here, bathing as it were, in the bosom of a softly-cushioned arm-chair, was Sir Welbore, his gold double eye-glasses clinging to the bridge of his nose, with a gentle nip. He was travelling laboriously down the hard high-roads of the *Leading Journal*, and had scarcely made half his journey. He was delayed by a sort of political economy "rut" that was full in his way. The Chancellor of the Exchequer had been speech-making at Paddington, and that brilliant financier had been dwelling in gorgeous rhetorical fireworks on the "buoyancy of the national resources," and complimenting the British taxpayer on his "elasticity." Sir Welbore was a little bewildered by the glare, and, as it were, saw rings and stars before his eyes ; out of which chaos arose a complacent thought—more an expression than a thought—a rich sonorous platitude, which he mistook for a thought—something that jingled like "expansion of the currency" and "depreciation of paper." He was addressing a spectral crowded meeting with, "And, Sir, when I see the glut of precious metals which must eventually go near to the final depreciation of our paper currency, and I will add, our credit——" At this point Jenny glided through, with her little waggoner's hat in her hand.

A real audience—an "intelligent young person, too," who took an interest in that sort of thing, was welcome indeed.

"Strange—hum—Miss—er—Odell, you recollect our little conversation the other night, what I was saying about the expansion of the precious metals ?" Indeed,

Jenny recollected it. The memory of that conversation would go down with her to the grave. This was conveyed in Jenny's expressive countenance. "Most singular the way things come out. Here is the right honourable gentleman the Chancellor of the Exchequer" (he loved these full-sounding dignities), "at the Paddington Operatives' Institute—hails—let me see—yes—'I hail the introduction of a flood of specie into these countries as symptoms of the healthy wellbeing of the State.' Did you ever hear such a doctrine? Now I ask you, Miss—er—Odell, what did I say to you about the glut of specie? What did——"

Poor Jenny's memory was, naturally enough, a blank as to the glut of specie—as well might he have put to her Kepler's Laws, in their proper order. But, lost in a gentle wonder at the behaviour of the right honourable gentleman, she murmured—

"Glut of specie! Ah, yes—yes, so true: exactly. How strange!"

"Strange!" said Sir Welbore; "did you ever know anything like it? I tell you I am not one of those who believe in this man; and I tell you, Miss—er—Odell—if I had been at that—er—Paddington meeting, I should have said to him—Sir, when I see—(pray take a chair—I don't wonder you are interested in these studies)—I should say to him—Sir——" And poor Jenny sat down with all the gentleness of an angel, and heard out the whole of the observations which would have been addressed to the right honourable gentleman who directs the finances of this mighty empire. She listened in ecstasy; when he had finished the meeting broke out into applause.

"How delightful! It is so rarely," she said, at the end, "that one meets a person at whose feet one can sit and listen in this way. It seems so easy, and yet so dreadfully difficult."

"It depends on the way these things are put," said he, complacently. "I don't think my friend Franklyn has much turn that way. He is content with leaving his gold locked up there, at his banker's, without ever him asking the famous question—What is a pound-note?"

Something flashed up in Jenny's full, round face—as though something had been whispered to her. She sighed very deeply, and then said, with mournfulest commiseration—

"Poor, dear Mr. Franklyn! Ah, Sir, *he* knows well the value of a pound."

"Oh—ah, of course, there were early difficulties in the family. He weathered them, I believe, with general skill."

"Ah," said Jenny, "*indeed* yes. He is a good, brave man—and has fought struggling, I may say, all his life. It really amounts to heroism," said Jenny, enthusiastically.

"Of course—of course—and therefore he has succeeded. Any one that properly puts their shoulder to the wheel, you know——"

"Succeeded!" said Jenny, mournfully. "Ah, Sir, it will never be known—it was not *his* fault. They have never yet *dared* to say *that*," said Jenny, excitedly.

"I believe him to be a very estimable person, indeed, but, er"—and Sir Welbore, bethinking him of a compliment that had been paid him by some one, who afterwards asked him for his interest and obtained it—that

he was a first-rate cross-examiner, and should have been at the bar, thought how he would skilfully practise his wonderful gifts on this young person.

"Yes—er—I have heard he managed his affairs—got them refund, you know, wonderfully?"

Jenny sighed again.

"We can't command success," said the Baronet, uneasily, and forgetting his amateur wig and gown. "He *has* been successful—at, least—h'm," he added, remembering his wig and gown; "he has—er—positively extricated himself?"

"Oh yes; oh, to be sure, of course," said Jenny, hastily. "Quite, I believe, Sir, altogether—entirely."

She was in sad confusion, for she saw she had been nearly betraying her benefactor. But Sir Welbore saw it too.

"But I understood this family—er—were now, I might say, opulent. I don't exactly understand, or see my way. I think it scarcely above board, or——"

"Oh, Sir, Sir," said Jenny, piteously, "if you were to know all the pains dear Mr. Franklyn takes—the weary nights, when we are all in bed. He is killing himself; indeed, it is not his fault."

The Baronet smiled grimly. He thought it was his acute powers of cross-examination had brought all this out.

"Pon my word, really, I was not prepared; that is—but no matter. Mr. Hodge, our professional adviser, will be here on Thursday, and—er—my friend Franklyn will of course, be prepared to meet him—will see that everything is explicit. You will excuse me, Miss—er—Odell. I have some letters—er."

Jenny took her way sorrowfully from the room, carrying her little hat reversed, as it were, as though she were at a military funeral. Sir Welbore looked after her, and thought of his own penetration. He said to himself many times, in a tone of pique—"’Pon my word! ’pon my word!" This was Jenny’s morning’s work, and it was a fair instalment, considering the little time that was left to her.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SMOKING-ROOM.

JENNY went out to gather flowers. She took her way to the garden, her hat in hand, to allow the breezes to fan her forehead. The truth was she felt she was a little heated about that region, for she was full of a rich generous blood; and for the last two or three months, since she had begun her secretarial duties at Mr. Maxwell’s, had been taking abundance of a generous port wine, "ordered" her by proper authority. Sometimes, therefore, this rich generous fluid rushed to her forehead, and would take up its abode there for an hour or more.

She gathered her flowers; then went forth to the fields, by the river, through the wood, and she felt the heat gratefully subsiding. A very pretty river it was, and she stood beside it for some time, mournfully watching the current pass by, and carry down the stray flower or two she cast upon its surface. So absorbed was she, that for several moments she did not perceive the sky

was growing cloudy, nor did she hear a bold, hearty voice calling to her—more properly “hailing” her. She looked up in affright. In a sort of bower, or natural alcove, which was on the river’s bank, had been stretched out young Craven, taking his midday cigar, and reading the authorised Sporting Journal; a combination of luxuries he was fond of.

“Hallo !” he cried again, “Miss Bell—Miss Bell !”

Jenny was scared. The privacy of her little meditation to be so rudely broken in upon. She was in a tremble, and instinctively turned to fly. She walked away quickly.

“Hallo ! hallo !” said young Craven, rising hastily, “where are you going to, Miss Bell ? Don’t run away, I say. Do wait.”

Jenny looked back indecisively, fluttered a moment, then went on.

“Good gracious !” said young Craven, testily, “what a creature she is ! I can’t make her out. I *say*,” he shouted, “*do* stop. Well, then, we shall see who can go fastest—a race, then !” And he started in pursuit.

Poor Jenny !—she stopped in one second—a frightened fawn, run down. The hunter came up, panting. The fawn was at his feet, with a piteous prayer for mercy in her eye. The hunter was generous. He took pity on that brilliant face, flushed with agitation, and put his knife back into its sheath.

“Well,” he said, “you have given me such a chase. What is the matter ? Why did you run away ?”

Jenny, barely yet recovered, looked round with alarm.

“Oh ! Mr. Craven,” she said, “you frightened me so ! I must go back—indeed I must.”

"*Must*," he said laughing. "Why, must? Are you on parole? Are the gates of Grey Forest to be shut at midday—eh?"

Jenny raised her eyes and began to laugh.

"Oh! Mr. Craven," she said, and began to laugh again.

The youth grew a little uneasy.

"Something is amusing you," he said; "I hope you don't find any——"

Jenny was serious in a second—nay, earnest, anxious.

"No, no, Mr. Craven," she said, "I was amused at the strange, quaint way you put things. Out on parole! That was, indeed, what I was laughing at—*indeed* it was. I am but a poor governess, and thrown with ordinary people, and never—scarcely ever—hear an original thought."

The youth smiled.

"But, I say again, what are you in such a hurry about? Why did you fly from me? I know I am a rough bear of a creature."

"*Rough!*" said Jenny, demurely. "Oh! it's not that—that is, I mean—I like roughness—that is—no—I—I—don't—I mean: oh! I *must* go back." And poor Jenny, in hopeless confusion, turned again to fly.

"Good gracious!" said the youth, unusually pleased. "Do wait—I have something to say—I have a message. Hallo! there's the rain at last. I knew it was coming." And half-a-dozen rude, heavy splashes came down, as pioneers of a heavy drenching shower.

"This way," said young Craven; "here's the smoking-room, as I call it, just at hand. How lucky! Don't

lose a second. It will take hours to soak through these trees."

Jenny was aghast, and shrunk.

"No, no," she said, "it can't be." And her face expressed "rather die first." "Let me go home!"

"What absurd nonsense!" he said, impatiently. "It is three-quarters of a mile to the house. There it comes," he added, as the sluices opened, and it began to descend like a cataract.

Jenny still hesitated, but he took her hand decisively, and led her, half resisting, under the trees. There they were in shelter, while they heard the rain all round, pattering fiercely among the branches, as on the roof of a gigantic greenhouse.

They were silent for a few moments.

"By Jove!" said he, "it looks as if it were set in."

Jenny sighed and kept looking out nervously—perhaps for help.

"This is quite jolly," said he—"quite an adventure—aint it?"

But Jenny was in sore distress.

"Oh! let us go," she said again—"let us go; I have done very—*very* wrong."

The youth laughed in his loud way.

"I don't know what to think," he said; "I *know* that I am a rude ogreish fellow—at least, they all tell me so—but still, I must say, I never intend to frighten ladies, the way I *appear* to have done. I must be something awful in manner and appearance."

Jenny smiled; she was beginning to get confidence.

"Indeed, no," she said; "I don't find that; on the contrary—that is, I mean, there were other reasons."

"Other reasons," said the youth; "come, come, this is getting exciting; out with them, Miss Bell."

"I did not mean that," said Jenny, haughtily.

"But you *said* so," said he; "come, I have you there. I insist on knowing. Indeed, you owe it to me—come."

"Oh!" said Jenny, "I am ashamed to say it. But I assure you—you may believe me—it was not *that*."

"Not what?" said the youth; "we are all in confusion. Not what?"

Jenny, pulling nervously at her gloves, and thus cruelly pressed, remained silent. The youth looked down at her, much amused. He was beginning to think he had strange powers of mind, which had hitherto lain dormant.

"I mean," said Jenny, desperately, and looking up with her most brilliant colour in her cheek (fruity)—"I mean—at least thought—I believe you hated—that is, disliked me."

"Dislike you," said the youth, gravely; "what put that into your head?"

"At first, I mean;" said Jenny (the first button of her glove coming off in her fingers.)

"At first, you mean," said he. "Oh! I see! No, no—what a delusion!"

"Oh! you did," said Jenny, mournfully. "You read my face, and I *know* it—and you thought me—that is, you had an instinctive sort of feeling——"

"Good gracious!" said he, "what an idea!"

"Oh! you know it is true," said Jenny, mournfully. "You always form a judgment when you first see a person. Ah, yes, and you said so—ah! you know you did."

"Said so," the youth answered, guiltily, and his thoughts went back to that first dinner. He *had* said so.

"And you don't mean to tell me," he added, with a curling lip, "that any one——"

Jenny clasped her hands in affright.

"Oh!" said she, "no—no—don't think of such a thing; I didn't say she did—I merely guessed—that is, I never meant to tell."

"Oh! of course," said he, smiling a little bitterly, "I understand. But now," he added, seriously, "I will confess. You won't be angry with me. At first—just at first—I did feel a little bit, you know; I don't know why—it was the most unreasonable thing in the world. But I assure you, you may believe me, it was not for more than—really I believe not more than a day. And now——"

He paused a second. The other button of Jenny's glove was nearly off.

"Well, at any rate, we are made up now. You don't hate me?"

"No, no, no," murmured Jenny (second button off.)

"And I never did dislike you; on the contrary," he said, hesitatingly, "this explanation will put everything on a satisfactory basis. In fact, from the time I heard—forgive my alluding to it—of a certain little history—of a certain sacrifice, which was really, I must say——"

"Oh! don't, don't," said Jenny, with a soft smile, and pressing her hands to her side, as if from a sudden spasm—"please, don't!"

"Since I heard," he went on, "of such noble conduct, as I must call it——"

"Oh!" said Jenny, "dearest Charlotte—I am sure it was she—she will always—I *wish* she would not. It——"

"No, no. It was not Charlotte; at least, I think not," said he, reflectively.

Jenny sighed.

"Some way," she said, "latterly, I am sure, dearest Charlotte does not like me so much. I don't know why; but so it is. Perhaps she thinks I was wrong, and does not take so indulgent a view as you so kindly do. I have very few friends," Jenny said, sadly—"very few!"

The youth looked down on her with interest. Pity, as we know, is akin to something warmer.

"Some way," he added, reflectively, "I *have* remarked Charlotte is not exactly—that is, is not what you call an enthusiastic friend of yours."

"And yet," said Jenny, "if she only knew how I love and esteem her. Do you know," she added, looking fixedly at young Craven, "I think she more nearly approaches my ideal of perfection in a human creature than any being I ever knew. She is so good, so grand, so calm, so quiet. There is a placid temper about her I really envy."

"Ah, exactly," said he, "that's just it. I almost wish she was a little more——"

"Hush!" said Jenny, looking out anxiously.

The rain was beginning to abate, and they both heard the sound of wheels. Then the rain came on more furiously, and the wheels seemed to come nearer.

Presently they saw the little open basket-carriage rolling along the avenue, with Charlotte and one of the girls, the latter driving.

The avenue wound very close by the river, and very close to young Mr. Craven's smoking-room; and to the surprise of the tenants of that apartment, the basket-carriage drove in upon the grass, and drew up under the outside shelter of the great clump of trees and bushes which made the walls and roof of the smoking-room. They were going to wait until the violence of the shower was somewhat abated. There was a smart page behind. They were so near they could hear them talking in the carriage.

Jenny said softly, "Let us go round and meet them. It is dear Charlotte."

The youth coloured, paused a moment, and then said awkwardly—"Hush! not a word. We will surprise them. A capital joke at dinner. See what fun we shall have."

Jenny lifted her eyebrows inquiringly, and with a bright smile; but the youth only pressed his fingers to his lips, and did not give further shape to his capital joke. And so they remained still without daring to move.

The smart page, a quick, intelligent Irish lad, with a taste for horses, and ripening fast into a light jockey, had got down from the back seat for more convenient shelter, and walked up and down, trying to divert the tedium of waiting. The light jockey now stood at the ponies' heads; now pitched a broken branch into the bushes; now stamped up and down and warmed his hands; and now examined objects of natural history in

the ground or in the trees—a very sharp, quiet, and discreet Irish youth.

In a few seconds the rain abated, and the young girl gave her ponies one light lash of her whip, and drove off; the wheels ran over the grass as on velvet. Just at this moment the little jockey, still busy with natural history, had come round to the very entrance of the smoking-room, and looked in. He heard the young girl calling “Now, Frank,” and was after them in a second, scaling the back seat very nimbly, but he looked behind him long.

It seemed to the two tenants of the chamber that he had not noticed them. Jenny was nervous.

“I must go now,” she said; “not an instant more can I stay. I fear we have done wrong, very wrong.”

The youth was awkward in his answer. He murmured something about “capital fun,” and “a joke at dinner.” But the clouds now breaking, and the rain finally ceasing, Jenny gathered up her skirts, so as to avoid the wet grass, looked round, and said very sweetly, “Now you must not come with me. Good-bye. We are friends now—at least I suppose I must believe that you do not quite hate me; so for the few days I stay we will live in peace and amity.”

He started.

“What! Going? I did not know this—are you serious?”

“Good-bye,” said Jenny; and shot away over the grass, very lightly, indeed, and gracefully.

The youth looked after her long, lit his cigar, and became pensive.

“By Jove!” he said, at last, a little impatiently.

With whom he connected this heathen appeal is not known. Perhaps he was thinking of his Charlotte.

His Charlotte was skimming along the wet gravel in the basket-carriage—and it may be, thinking of him.

The young girl who was driving presently spoke of him, and said,—

“I wonder where Charles has hid himself all the morning?”

The smart jockey, whose seat brought him very close to the ladies, and who was always much entertained in these rides by the scraps of conversation that reached him, here broke in respectfully—

“Please, Ma’am, I saw Mr. Charles and Miss Bell behind the trees where we were waiting,” and he touched his hat again, by way of punctuation, or full stop. Was this Irish lad only following his nature, or was this a spice of malice? Neither of the ladies answered him; but drove on in silence up to the door of the house.

Mr. Franklyn passed a miserable day in the society of his papers. This had become a sort of mania with him, though perfectly bootless. Decency then required a certain amount of personal attendance upon his guest, the Baronet. But that potentate—who was put out, by having only imperfectly digested portions of his *Times*—just as a cobra does half its blanket—was testy; and besides, had clearly something on his mind.

They went out together, and after much dry clearing of his throat, and non-natural huskiness, he said to Mr. Franklyn—

“You know—er—that Mr. Hodge will be here—er—on Thursday.”

“Yes; yes,” said the other, hastily.

"He will bring with him all the papers. You know, Franklyn," said the Baronet, stopping short, "a thing of this sort is—er—hum—business. No compliments. 'Xcuse me," he added, waving his hand impatiently; for Mr. Franklyn, colouring much, was about to interrupt. "You understand—two business men—hem—you and I—spade, a spade."

"Of course," said Mr. Franklyn, with some dignity, "there is no question about it. Mr. Crowle will be prepared to meet your man of business on Thursday."

"Exactly," said Sir Welbore; "that's exactly the footing I wish it to be on—the—er—thing done, you know. I shouldn't like to have it said that Charles married—er—without—you understand."

"My daughter," said Mr. Franklyn, haughtily, "has seven thousand pounds on the day of her marriage, down; if you should require it before," he added, with an attempt at sarcasm, "of course."

"H'm! h'm! Very good—very good—quite proper, indeed," said the Baronet; "quite so. Between you and me, my dear Franklyn," he added, confidently, but now in good humour again, "I *don't* quite like the look of—gold at present."

Mr. Franklyn looked blankly at him.

"No, it's not healthy—glut of the precious metals—too much stock at the bank. Between you and me the Chancellor is too fond of paradoxes and tricks. There will be a tightness—we shall be tight by-and-by, mark my words."

CHAPTER XXII.

JENNY'S EVENING WORK.

HALF an hour before dinner a chaise came driving up, and Mr. Crowle, the young man of business, jumped out, fresh from London. He sought Mr. Franklyn's room. When the whole party were gathering together for dinner, from azimuth and nadir, and trooping down resplendent, Jenny, who was sliding in by herself in simplest virgin white muslin, and with a crimson flower in her hair, was stopped on the stairs, not by the Mr. Franklyn, the miner of the morning, but by a man the same indeed, but ten years younger : he was bright, cheerful, happy.

"Jenny, Jenny," he said, in a delighted whisper, "good news. It is all settled—all *but* settled. Not only Charlotte's money, but double ; so that it will clear us a good deal. There is a load off my breast, and Crowle, good Crowle—has done it all."

Jenny smiled, pressed his hand cordially, but said nothing. She conveyed an immense deal of indefinite meaning in that squeeze. She passed in hurriedly but bit her crimson lips as she entered.

Before her was Charlotte, measuring her, not angrily, she was too tranquil for that—but with a shade of scorn and contempt. On our Jenny's active mind a light suddenly flashed. "She knows all, and is harshly misconstruing our little innocent adventure of the morning." And she glided straight up to her and took her hand, and said (Sir Welbore was standing beside Charlotte)—

"Dearest Charlotte, I have such a business to tell you

of. Such an adventure as we had this morning, shut up under a tree, dear Charlotte. Only think, while the floodgates of heaven—is not that right, Mr. Wells?" added Jenny, demurely, to the curate, wishing to be set right in her Scripture—"the floodgates of heaven were opened, and I thought would have swept us away into the river."

The half-defiant, half-insolent way in which our Jenny made this declaration, was, to use the French word, *impayable*. Sir Welbore, finance being off his mind, allowed himself to be interested.

"Where—hum—was this—er—unpleasant affair—under that shower—hey? 'Pon my word, very inconvenient."

"Indeed," said Jenny, demurely, "only for Mr. Craven——"

"Indeed," said the Baronet, with interest. "And how did Charles help you? Come, now."

Jenny told it all with natural simplicity, but at the same time with wonderful confidence for her. But there was a pleasant gaiety in her tone when she addressed herself to Charlotte. Indeed, there was a curious change in Jenny this day or two back. She was gradually gliding into the centre place, and drawing most of the circle to her. Sir Welbore called her his "financial pupil;" young Craven took interest in her; the curate worshipped; and Charlotte—how was Charlotte inclined to her? At this moment she was looking at her with a strange expression, half scared—almost breathless, at what she thought this effrontery. But presently she grew defiant, and answered Jenny with her old calmness.

Young Craven came down last, and in great spirits.

Dinner was then announced; and he took down, as was his duty, his affianced, Charlotte. There was a tone of joyousness over the whole party this day. Mr. Franklyn, filled with his good news, was cheerful, which in him was the same as the merriment of another person. Sir Welbore was complacent. He was thinking of writing a letter to the *Dorkingshire Conservative* on the miserable fallacies of the Chancellor as to the expansion of the precious metals. Young Craven was boisterous—he knew why—Jenny, nearly opposite, was bright, and sparkled and shone like a precious stone. Mr. Franklyn said gaily—

“Well, Charles, I suppose you got through the morning somehow?”

Young Craven coloured a little.

“Oh! I was out, Sir.”

“What! under that shower?”

“Oh! no, Sir,” said the youth, with an intelligent look at Jenny, which with stupid complacency he fancied was understood but by her. Charlotte’s eyes were upon him.

She dropped her voice—

“You were not out in that storm?” she said.

“Oh! no,” he answered in the same tone, “I was in shelter—got home quite safe. By-the-way, what shall we do to-night?”

Charlotte’s eyes were still upon him.

“Why make a mystery?” she said, mildly. “What a pity! You are not beginning to be afraid of me, I hope?”

“Afraid!” said he, confused. “What do you mean, Charlotte?”

"Oh ! Jenny—Miss Bell—has been amusing the company with your comic adventures. So you see——"

His cheeks blushed up, and he threw a fierce look at Jenny. Jenny was delighted. She was just opposite, and was legitimately in the conversation.

"Good gracious !" she said, with a bright toss of her head, "you don't suppose we are carrying on a conspiracy, Mr. Craven ; you won't get me to join in manufacturing terrible secrets of that sort. No, no—quite a mistake, I assure you," said Jenny, with an engaging smile.

The youth was angry and even bitter. He had been made ridiculous—even guilty-looking ; and I am afraid the dialogue between him and Charlotte in some degree reflected that tone. Jenny spoke on :—

"Do you know," said she, aloud, and in her *new* gay way—(she was picking a grape now and again)—"I seem to have done something wicked ; I feel like a—a—Sir Welbore, you can tell me ; what do they call the people at trials that appear against their companions, you know, Sir Welbore ? "

"King's evidence, I er—believe," said the Baronet, pompously, for he loved to hear the chime of his own name oft repeated.

Of this night Jenny, with new prerogatives, sat enthroned. She flitted about the drawing-room very brilliant, Charlotte watching with a curious look. With a strange confidence, Jenny came over to her, engaging as a child, and sitting down beside her, said anxiously, "Dear Charlotte, you look so worn and ill ! quite changed, I declare. You must be ill." Charlotte's was not a trained temper. She almost shook her off,

Jenny lifted her eyes with gentle astonishment. Mr. Wells, the curate, was standing by and watching.

"I am perfectly well," said Charlotte. "I am no actress. I speak what I feel."

Jenny smiled. Young Craven was in sight, affecting to talk earnestly to Mr. Franklyn, but looking over wistfully at them. The sensible girl's voice had a slight quiver.

"When do you leave here?" said Charlotte, speaking quickly. "I hear you speak of going."

"Oh, soon—soon—too soon," said Jenny, speaking a little loud. "I must quit this dear old house, and go back to—to school! A dream—such a dream!"

"Not too soon," said the other, looking at her steadily.

Jenny laughed a silver laugh, with the faintest fringe of a scoff. "One would say, dearest, you wished me away. How inhospitable! Perhaps I am in the way—in *your* way—eh?"

This latter she said in a lower key.

"What can it be?" she went on. "You are not afraid of anything? Afraid of poor me!" and again the mocking laugh furnished accompaniment. No one would know Jenny to-night.

Poor Charlotte seems to have been sadly unsteady and off her centre. "Afraid!" she said, colouring. "No, indeed! I am stronger than I seem! and know more than I seem to know."

Jenny was lost in wonder at the poor weak declaration. She said, drily, to Mr. Wells, who was drawing near, and had only caught scraps of this curious dialogue, "Shall we have a game to-night, Mr. Wells? Do get

them together and make them play. Now, dear, cross Charlotte, are you in the humour for that ? ”

Young Craven was coming across eagerly as Jenny was speaking.

“ Do play,” said Jenny. “ *Play against me !* ”

The sensible girl trembled. Her eyes lighted up.

“ I am not afraid,” she said, as she said before.

Then said Jenny, as Mr. Craven stood beside them and listened—

“ Do you know, dear, I feel *as if I had won already ?* ”

She left the affianced ones together, as was her duty, and fled away. She recollected something, as she passed Mr. Crowle, who had been watching her, with something like a weak solution of admiration—at least, he was astonished at the change. The young man of business seemed to suggest something suddenly to her, for her eyes flashed. She wandered into the greenhouse by herself to pick a flower (she humbly asked Mr. Franklyn's leave), and from the plants presently came a silvery voice—“ Mr. Crowle ! ”

He rose from his chair and obeyed the call. The curate would have rushed too, but was late.

“ Could you help me down with that geranium pot ? Thanks—there—now you can go back.”

But Mr. Crowle was not inclined ; as yet, at least.

“ It is a long time since you have been here,” he said.

“ By the way, you go back to London to-morrow ? ” said Jenny.

“ Yes,” said he, “ early in the morning ; the first thing.”

"And why not stay?" said she, with interest. "You are no sooner come than gone."

He laughed, at what was not very clear.

"I must go," he said; "business—important business."

"Business—always business," said Jenny, trimming a geranium with a little pair of garden scissors. "Some little bill of costs; why can't you stay, then, but a few days—*my* last days?"

"It is the family business," he said. "You must have heard of that. We are trying to dig a fortune for Miss Charlotte out of Lombard Street."

"Trying!" said Jenny, with astonishment. "Why, dear Mr. Franklyn told me, before dinner, it was all settled; that it was all done. And I am sure," added she, "they *all* think so."

"He is premature," said he, impatiently. "How fond people are of chattering. Nothing of the kind. It may be done; it may *not* be done. I may say it rests with me."

"Ah," said Jenny, with one of her old looks of intense, devout admiration; and laying down the garden scissors, the better to clasp her hands, "Ah, how good of you—*how* good!"

Mr. Crowle smiled.

"You do everything," she went on, "for this family?"

Mr. Crowle smiled.

"Our interest," he said, "very often goes beside our affection."

"Ah, yes," said Jenny, with meaning, "and our affection often rises above our interest: even above what foolish people would be offended with."

Mr. Crowle looked at her, a little inquiringly.

"Yes," Jenny went on in a torrent of words; "yes, *that* is true and genuine regard; and that is what they said was so generous, so noble in Mr. Crowle. Those two foolish children, they would laugh at anything; but I was amazed when I heard of it. But I call it *real* nobleness."

A slight little contortion passed over Mr. Crowle's placid face.

"So they tell everything in this family, it seems," he said. "No secrets."

"Poor children," said Jenny, commiseratingly, "they want a little discretion. Even our dear Charlotte says things sometimes against her own interest."

"And she told you," said he, "about this—this——"

"The little joke," said Jenny, resuming her scissors and snipping away merrily. "It was a little absurd; and even Sir Welbore, who is a little dry—there, I declare, they want me. Mr. Franklyn says no one makes his evening cup like me," and Jenny tripped in.

Mr. Crowle followed slowly, looking round on all with a peculiar smile. "Told to a full dinner-table, I suppose. Ah! very well! very good!"

"My dear Crowle," said Franklyn, taking him affectionately by the arm, "we must be up for you in the morning. I shall see about your breakfast myself. It is so good of you. I feel a new man. Positively," he continued, gaily, "I shall begin to have quiet nights again. You have taken millstones off my heart. How shall we all thank you?"

"You shall all thank me on my next visit," said Mr. Crowle, with an agreeable smile; "that is, when *I de-*

serve them. But you won't mind my stealing off to bed—you know I have to be up in the morning."

"My dear Crowle," said the other, "let me ring for a candle."

"No, no, let me go quietly—good-night—*good-night*. You may begin to sleep to-night."

In high spirits Jenny watched him disappear, then turned to take a glance round the company. She was standing at the greenhouse, and the natural glow of colour diffused over her stood out well upon the green background, she thinking which of her slaves she would call next.

Suddenly Charlotte, who had watched every motion of her—who had seen her enter the greenhouse with Mr. Crowle, and come back again—who had seen him depart, and seen, too, Jenny's look as he quitted the room—rose up suddenly and went over to Jenny. The sensible girl's intelligence, quickened by distrust, had a presentiment of what had taken place.

She looked at her a moment wistfully.

"Jenny," she whispered, earnestly, "be generous—forgive—forget the past."

"Dear Charlotte," said Jenny, looking round on the company, "what do you mean?—you frighten me."

"Yes," said Charlotte; "I own it, was wrong, and you suffered a great deal. I beg your pardon humbly—it was wrong. Forgive, not for my sake, but for his; and if you were to know how his heart is set on this—how he lives but for us—oh, Jenny!"

Jenny's wonder was extreme.

"Dear Charlotte, what riddles and mysteries are all these? Goodness! I am getting quite nervous. Poor

me! a poor, dependent creature, to forgive—to think of forgiving. Ah! Charlotte, you are amusing yourself.”

“Listen to me—do,” said the other, more hurriedly, and catching her by the sleeve; for Jenny was moving away; “any—any submission, do you hear, for his sake?”

“I am getting bewildered, dear,” said Jenny, putting her raised hands upon her forehead; “don’t talk this way any more—pray don’t.”

“Is it possible?” said the other, with a lip that was beginning to curl. “No; I would not believe it—you are not so wickedly vindictive as——”

“Hush! hush! dear,” said she, looking round in alarm. “What odd things you are saying! Take care, dear. *No, no; I am for going on with our game,*” added she, with something like a sudden flash of defiance—“with the gentlemen, I mean. Just as I feel in a winning humour, too. No, no; come, dear.”

And she moved away, and went over to the gentlemen, and had presently started a very agreeable little round game.

* * * * *

“Good-night, Sir Welbore, *good-night*. See you to your room? No? Ah, you begin to know your way—ha, ha!”

Sir Welbore remarked to Lady Welbore, “That—that er—Franklyn was a strange, inconsequential creature, and in—er—a flow of spirits that night.”

“Good-night—*good-night*, dearest,” said Mr. Franklyn, at the foot of the stairs. “Sleep well: I shall. No papers to-night, darling—no, nor to-morrow night—ha,

ha! An heiress, I declare—quite an heiress! Let me tell you, my pet, it is not every or any woman in the county can bring her husband seven thousand pounds. Good-night—*good-night*.”

* * * * *

In the morning came the mail. Mr. Franklyn got two business letters, which he laughed over. One from Dunton and Co.

Dunton and Co., much outraged with long waiting and with patience generally exhausted, had reluctantly placed the matter in the hands of Dunton and Co.'s solicitor, who now respectfully named a day, after which he had been instructed to proceed.

Dart, Burton, and Co., an eminent firm of solicitors, with patience also sorely tried, were also on the eve of “proceeding.” The camel's back, &c.

Mr. Franklyn, after breakfast, went to his desk. With a light heart he wrote to both Dunton and Co., and to Dart, Burton, and Co., telling them that a successful arrangement had just been effected, and that he had written instructions to his agent, Mr. Crowle, now in London, who would wait on them forthwith. “A thousand apologies, my dear Sirs,” wrote Mr. Franklyn, exuberantly, “for the inconvenience I have put you to. A thousand thanks, too, for your indulgence. But we are now, I am happy to say, getting straight, and shall shortly have the pleasure of enclosing you a cheque for your full amount.”

He posted these two with great satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JENNY WINS.

SIR WELBORE CRAVEN and "Lady" were packing up already. They were going to-morrow. Reluctantly, too, was Jenny departing. With the kindest consideration, the Baronet had, in a stately manner, offered Jenny the remaining seat in their grand coach which was to come for them. Jenny, overpowered with gratitude, said humbly, she thankfully accepted so kind, so *considerate* an offer. She looked over at dear Charlotte as she accepted it.

Sir Welbore's man of business, Mr. Hodge, was to arrive that night, and wait a day or two to meet Mr. Crowle. "Now that everything is so satisfactory, you—er—sec, I may as well—er—go."

"I am very sorry, Sir Welbore—*very* sorry, that we are to lose you."

"Crowle seems a very intelligent person," said the other, approvingly. "Crowle seems to know his business. Eh?"

"Invaluable, Sir Welbore. He has been of inestimable assistance to me. Now, I don't mind saying to you, Sir Welbore, who knows everything, and hears everything" (Sir Welbore laid his head wisely upon one side, as upon an aerial pillow, and waved his hand, as who should *passer pour cela*), "that I have had heavy—very heavy charges to meet upon the estate."

"Quite so," said Sir Welbore.

"I am not ashamed to own it," said Mr. Franklyn, with a little state. "You know it—many know it."

Sir Welbore lifted his head suddenly from his pillow not liking this community of knowledge.

"Well, I don't scruple confessing—that—ha, ha!—that even about Charlotte's money—ha, ha!—I *was* a little uneasy for a time, you know. Crowle is gloomy by nature."

"Quite so," said the other. "We all want money. 'Pon my word now, I myself shouldn't object to, say forty thousand pounds just now. There's the Dudgeley estate going for a mere song. But where is a pauper like me to look for it? There was a time I could afford such things—ha, ha!"

Thus, pleasant were the two gentlemen.

At night, when they were all gone to bed, arrived, in a chaise of his own, the Baronet's man of business—a dry man, that seemed as if he was made of any other material in the world but human flesh and bone. By business habits he seemed to have worked everything warm, genial, or moist out of his system, just as racing and boating men do in *their* training. He appeared at breakfast in the morning, spoke scarcely at all, could tell no town news, ate very little, and looked at his watch some dozen times. He looked out of the window occasionally, as if he was expecting somebody to pass by whom he might rush upon and stop. All through the day, he looked at his watch, consulted his pocket-book occasionally, looked at the door when he was not opposite a window, as though the person who was to pass the window might slip by that way unawares. Sir Welbore whispered he was a most useful sort of person indeed.

Mr. Crowle, Mr. Franklyn said, was at that moment (lunch hour) actually—let him see—at Bootham. The half-past eight train would bring him, or he would telegraph. Sir Welbore's train was half-past five. Great black plate chests, holding dresses instead of plate, were standing in the hall, and beside them Jenny's little trunk, modestly shrinking into a corner, corded neatly, but with economy of rope, and seeming to say piteously, like Mr. Sterne's famous donkey, "Don't thrash me."

It was growing dark. The light at the lodge window was lit, and could be seen twinkling. Coal had been brought up for the fires. Shawls, cloaks, sticks, and umbrellas—bound together like Roman fasces—were being borne down from upper chambers. Sir Welbore was making stately progress up and down stairs with no declared object.

Suddenly the sound of wheels was heard in the avenue. Many people looked out of windows—thinking it Sir Welbore's great coach, now nearly due. It was only a gig.

Sir Welbore and Mr. Franklyn were talking in the hall, and heard the wheels.

"It is he," said Mr. Franklyn, with a smile. "How lucky! and before you are gone—I am so glad—you can spare us a quarter of an hour. It will be so satisfactory."

Sir Welbore inclined his head graciously.

Mr. Franklyn went to the door himself and opened it. Through the gloom he saw a gig standing, and a person getting down who was—not Mr. Crowle.

It was the station-master of the railway station.

"Telegraph message, Mr. Franklyn," said he, handing him the regular pale blue envelope. "Thought I would take it myself—passing by: you would get it sooner, as it might be important."

"Very kind of you," said Franklyn, a little disappointed. "Thank you."

"No Crowle," he said to Sir Welbore, opening the envelope. There was no light in the hall, so he turned straight into his study, where there was one.

He came out in a second, and was passing by Sir Welbore, without speaking, when that gentleman called to him—

"Well? Can't come by this train—first train to-morrow."

"In a moment," said the other, in a low voice, and passed up stairs.

He came back in a few moments.

"Just step in here with me into the study," he said. The two entered, and the door was closed.

Sir Welbore's great coach was now arrived—with its two lamps flaming like lighthouses. The great chests were hoisted up, and his servants began to fasten up the cloaks and shawls—Sir Welbore's man taking up the fasces on his shoulder, as though he were a real born Roman lictor. Jenny came tripping down, modestly attired for travel, and the hall filled in as with a crowd. The lamps were now lit. A mild and dignified embracing set in. Now, where was Sir Welbore?

Out of the study came the two gentlemen—one a ghastly, pale, trembling creature; the other a hot, fuming, excited person.

Neither spoke. The hot, excited Baronet passed out to his coach, without addressing any adieus to the spectators. The other tottered up stairs. The family looked on with a little wonder. Then came more of a modulated *accolade*. Then Lady Craven entered her coach, with state.

Then Jenny, who made as though she would have humbly ascended behind—a place, indeed, too superior for her. Then Sir Welbore entered with a jerk, and flung himself back, muttering; and finally young Craven, who sat *next* Jenny.

They drove away. The great bee-hive reeling and swinging; maid and man poised boastfully behind.

When they were gone, and all were turning away from looking after them, a white face was put out from the study-door, and it said—

“Charlotte—girls—come in!”

They came in, silent and cowed—they were wondering and afraid. He closed the door, and then the light fell upon his face.

Then Charlotte rushed up to him, and put her arms around him.

“Father, dearest father! It is no harm; it is not worth a thought, if you can bear it.”

There was a white paper in his hand, which was fluttering as though it were being blown by a breeze. He put her back gently. •

“It is all over, dear children,” he said. “God help us—God help you!”

He let Charlotte take the paper from him, and sank—rather fell—into a chair beside him. Charlotte calmly held it over the light, and read in the usual pencil character :—

"Elec. Teleg. Co.'s Offices,

"Charing-cross, 4 o'clock. P.M.

"William Crowle to John Franklyn.

"It is all off. At the last moment the party has refused. What am I to do next? I don't know of any other quarter we can try."

They all remained in silence, looking at the fatal piece of tissue-paper in Charlotte's hand. The younger girls understood it all, and stood there trembling and clinging together.

Mr. Franklyn presently spoke to them in a low, broken voice—yet with an attempt at cheerfulness that seemed ghastly—

"Come, dear children," he said, "don't take it to heart. It is a blow—a great blow; but we will weather it, as—as—we have done others before."

"Oh! father, father," they all burst out, with crying and wailing, and ran up to him.

"Now, now, don't," said he, mildly, "this is foolish. Go up stairs now, like good children, and leave me here with Charlotte. We must only strike out some other plan, that's all. Go now, like dear, good children. It is not so bad as you think."

They went away sobbing and lamenting, and left father and daughter together. It seemed a lonely house that night—after all the late company and universal gaiety so very desolate, as though it had been swept and cleared to be a fitting tenement for ill news.

Later, Charlotte came up, very quiet and calm, and cheered up the young girls, bade them be of good heart, and all would go well; that papa was very far-seeing and

clever, and that he had already struck out a new plan, which, with their good friend Mr. Crowle's assistance, would help them out of this.

Then the lamp was brought in, and there was an affectation of something being read and of something being worked. But it was wretched—altogether wretched—and long after, when those girls were grown up, they looked back to it with a tremble, as the most miserable night of their life.

They carried out their little bit of acting faithfully for each other's sake ; and then, later than usual, went up to bed. Cells—cold, dreary cells—they seemed to them, for that night at least. Charlotte stayed up much later, possibly to talk with her father.

The morning was dark and gloomy, and there were sheets of heavy rain descending steadily, all about the house. It darkened the air of the breakfast-room additionally as they came down.

Charlotte came in with an air of cheerfulness, which they thought was the assumed one of last night continued. She came with a letter in her hand.

"Come !" she said to them, "what did I say last night? There is something to encourage us—a letter from an old relative—Cousin John Hall—who has not written these seven years. He talks of coming to England shortly ; and listen to what he says :—'I am curious to see my god-child, little Charlotte, again, and am delighted she is making so good a match. I mean to gratify myself by adding a good sum to her portion, if only to keep up the family credit. I am getting tired of these foreigners, and want to see my own flesh and blood again.' There, children ! there's a bit of good

news for papa. Which of you will run to the study and fetch him in to breakfast?"

Both ran gaily. Charlotte lifted her eyes to heaven with a bright thankfulness. And in this acknowledgment there is nothing for herself; it was for the curse of moral squallor and utter desolation thus happily averted from their house.

They came back. "Papa is not to be disturbed," they say; "but we told him through the keyhole."

"Quite right, dears," said Charlotte. "He is busy. I may fill out his tea for him."

More of that welcome letter was read, and they wondered at what bounded extent Cousin John Hall would stay his liberality for Charlotte. Then more of the letter was read, amid universal delight, and genial complacency on Charlotte's part.

The tea was filled out and getting cold.

"Run again, dear," said Charlotte. "Stay, I will go myself."

She went herself; tapped at his door; tried the handle; spoke through the keyhole, but was not answered. She looked through the keyhole, for the key was away, and saw what satisfied her, for she went up stairs quickly his bed-room.

It was not locked; but had not been slept in that night.

* * * *

The sensible girl was equal to the emergency. She became on the instant a captain in that disordered house. The true probability flashed upon her in a second; he had hurried away himself by night to London, to settle that business himself. But still, while this was being set at

rest, no harm to provide for the case of another issue. No confusion ; no flurry ; all private, and even secret. Steward, a steady, silent official, is called in ; he knows of other steady men that *he* can depend on ; leave it to him.

Telegraph to London—quickly, too, to Mr. Crowle. Reply in three quarters of an hour. Not been seen there.

All through that day, through the great, heavy sheets of rain, which hung about the house and plantations, like the folds of huge slate-coloured curtains, the steady man and his steady men pursued the task that had been put into their hands. All through the day Charlotte acted a tremendous part, with consummate bravery. It was a magnificent effort of mind ; little household concerns ; up stairs, down stairs, speaking with this one and that, and all the time her heart in her mouth. Her younger sisters were actually imposed on ; one was heard singing in her room. These moral deeds are not weighed *here*—cannot, indeed, be known. Thrice noble girl ! true as steel and good as gold.

But it was a long day ; as long as dark. It rolled on heavily until five o'clock, when the door-bell rang gently, and Charlotte, who was in the study, came out hurriedly to open it. It was the steady man with a lantern, with his steady men behind him ; all three soaked and saturated with the day's rain. The steady man laid his lantern down on the step outside, and, motioning his men back, came in by himself. He said, clearing his throat :—

“Miss, Miss, you mustn't—that is—we have—found him.”

In that little island, where they used to have their merry making teas, had they found John Franklyn, Esq., lying out on his back in the sludge, with his arms stretched out, and a little chemist's bottle of some cheap essential oil beside him.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

JENNY'S WELCOME "HOME."

JENNY was once more at her home in Chesterfield Street. Mr. Maxwell was overjoyed to see his "faithful secretary" again. His whitened face lightened up, as she entered. "Oh, Miss Bell, I am *so* glad." He took both her hands in his, and welcomed her like a father receiving back a dear and long-parted daughter—which was, indeed, a phrase we borrow from one of Jenny's letters, describing the scene.

It was new life to him. A sagacious maid who had noted the influence of Jenny's natural character in the house, came good-naturedly to tell her of all that had gone on in her absence. Mr. Maxwell had, indeed, moped and moped—was not the same man. "It was a charity, Miss, for you to come. And indeed, Miss," adds the sagacious maid, "you are wanted sadly. The house aren't the same since you was gone."

Jenny—overlooking the grammar—smiled approvingly on this well-meaning person.

"Thank you, Rachel," she said; "it is very good of you to think so."

"And, oh, Miss, she—she's"—this was the popular mode, below stairs, of referring to the mistress of the house—"she's been dreadful bad. I don't mean, Miss, worse than is common—but in her ways. Her ways has got awful; and, poor master, such a time as he has had of it!"

"Oh, Rachel," said Jenny, "don't. We must recollect how much she suffers. If you or I were tried in the same way," &c. From this confidential attendant a good many curious details were obtained, under protest, as it were, on our Jenny's side.

Mr. Maxwell fluttered about her awkwardly, that day of her arrival. He was rejoiced, and came back from chambers much earlier. Pocklington Minors (a case of heavy estates in Chaucery, with an application for increased allowance on the part of mother for the education and maintenance of Pocklington Minors) suffered a little in consequence. He had a feast that day, and the generous, fruity port "ordered" for her was supplemented by a more exhilarating vintage. He was longing for his study and the lamp-light—he told Jenny; and for his faithful, patient secretary to be at her old post.

The faithful secretary, to say the honest truth, did not at all relish the resumption of the duty; she would have preferred the fire in her own room—and (she was also "ordered" this luxury)—with her feet upon the fender—and one of the drawing-room easy-chairs, which had found its way there; for her spine and back joints were delicate, and required care. And there was a pile of M. Bernardi's yellow French "things," all of the newest, which had accumulated in her absence.

These were tempting enough : but self-sacrifice (for self, ultimately) was one of Jenny's special features of character. So that night—even that night of her arrival, fatigued as she was with travel—she went down to work. But there had been provided for her here an easy-chair, very soft and billowy, which received Jenny like the lap of the sea, and a good glowing fire (which he never had for himself) ; and there stood close by, a flagon of that generous fluid, which had been "ordered" for Jenny, and which would be now useful as a sort of stimulant.

The barrister's eyes were good enough by this time ; but he had got to look placidly on this joint fashion of conducting business. He kept her prisoner there till midnight—over Pecklington Minors. By this time Jenny actually knew the mechanism of hunting up cases, and actually was familiar with Measom and Welsby and their families—with Vesey junior, and all his offsprings—with House of Lords' Cases—with even the old *Invalides* Hospital of Salkeld, Raymond, and such veterans. She could tell the shelf where they resided, and with a spring could lay her nice hand upon their calf shoulders. She was very quick and clever, our Jenny, when anything had to fall within the purview of her scheme. And so she gradually fell back into the old walk.

But there was a great change remarked in Jenny—both below, in the charmed kitchen and pantry circles, and even in a slight degree, above. Our Jenny had been on a successful tour, as it were. She had asserted herself, and left her mark. She had been courted and had received admiration. She had stolen upwards into

position. Faces had been turned towards hers as to a centre—nay, had looked after hers. Above all, she had fought, not ingloriously—and so far, she had believed, had conquered.

These things were reflected in her carriage and manner. People in the house felt somehow influenced by the change. She had lost the lowly dependent bearing, and looked forward with calm, straight superiority. She was indeed flushed with triumph, and sometimes wrote in her diary; often looked back—how far back now?

But she knew nothing of anything that might have taken place at Grey Forest since she left; and she was growing curious to see the issue. She did not know Mr. Crowle's address; and she actually thought of writing down to Mr. Wells, the curate, for information about the dear Franklyn family, "their common friends." But the day she came to this resolve, she learnt a little more than this; and this was about three weeks, or say a month, after quitting Grey Forest.

It was about five o'clock, pretty dark, and Mr. Maxwell had not come home from his chambers. Jenny was in her room, at her fire, supported in the embrace of her chair, with her lower limbs folded comfortably over each other, much in the way gentlemen do; and by the light of the lamp, was engrossed by a lively thing of Victor Crétin's, in a delicate peach-blossom cover, entitled "*Vous, Moi, et Elle*" (Collection Pasquier). The paper was beautiful, and though there were only a few lines in each page, Jenny found a surprising amount of dramatic action, for such curtailed limits. "*Elle*" (Therèse) was attached with frightful warmth to "*Vous*" (Hector) who did not reciprocate that passion, but was

horribly infatuated by "Moi" (Marie). Strange to say, by an unhappy complication, "Elle" and "Vous" have been secretly and mysteriously united (in a dark place) by the conventional rite, which civilisation still tolerates, but neither are conscious of this fatal tie, which is so well known to be a final impediment to all *real* domestic happiness. Some one, well-meaning but foolish, reveals the secret to "Elle." She, more well-meaning, yet more foolish, in a moment of confidence, betrays it to "Vous" who finds (naturally) his frantic love converted to frantic hate by the sense of this odious tie. "Va-t-en," lui dit Hector, avec une sourire amère. "Je te hais! A cet accueil froide et cruelle, la misérable tomba à ses genoux, presque évanouie."

Jenny's breath came and went. She held the book high and in a line between her and the chimney-piece. She felt inexpressibly comfortable, and nestled, as it were, in her chair.

She was panting to know what shape the *dénouement* would take, for she was naturally of a romantic turn, and loved to read of all the turns and perplexities of what is called "the gentle passion." At this critical moment, a voice of earth and sheer prose broke the spell.

"There is a person in the hall, Miss, as wishes to see you."

Jenny let the peach-coloured tale fall on her lap. "What brings her at this hour?" she said. "It is inconvenient." (She thought it was the dressmaker.)

"I'm sure I don't know, Miss," said Rachel, not knowing Jenny was thinking of the dressmaker; "but she wishes to see you particular."

Jenny said "Very well, Rachel; thank you, Rachel."

—read a little more of the curious embarrassments of Hector and Marie—got up with a sigh of interest, and went down.

The lamp was lighted, and at the end of the hall, by the hall-door, there was standing—not a dressmaker, but a tall, dark figure, craped and veiled all over—a black marble statue. Jenny's instinct told her who it was in a second. She stepped back a little—then ran forward with a delighted cry of recognition.

Charlotte raised her arm, and stopped her. She spoke in a low, hard voice, unlike the old Charlotte tones.

“Stay—stay there. Don't come nearer—you have done sufficient with your acting——”

Jenny was wondering at the crape and the deep mourning, and did not much heed the speaker.

“Won't you come in and sit down?” she said. “Do, dear Charlotte; and let us talk.” And she again offered to go up to Charlotte, in her old affectionate way.

“Keep back,” said Charlotte, with something like terror in her face, and catching the handle of the door—“don't come near me—MURDERESS!”

Jenny gave a start, perfectly genuine. Charlotte had spoken loudly, and Jenny, with a wisdom that never deserted her, turned round and softly closed a door that was between the two halls.

“What do you mean,” she said, “by this curious language? You must be going mad.”

Charlotte laughed a hollow laugh. “More acting! But I have not come to talk to you, but to *tell* you something. You *are* a murderess, for it was *your* work.”

Sincerely and candidly, Jenny could not understand

her. Who was murdered? *What was the meaning of the black and the crape?*

She was not in the least angry at the language. She really thought Charlotte's brain was unsettled.

"Yes," said Charlotte, with excited voice; "and you shall not escape. I humbled myself to you—meanly, I own; but it was for *his* sake. You had no pity, you cold, heartless, cruel, savage creature!"

It was a wise precaution of our Jenny shutting that door, for Charlotte was raising her voice.

Jenny's cheeks were beginning to colour a little. Without being conscious of having done anything, she did not relish being assailed in this personal way.

"But," said Charlotte, hurriedly, "you shall not escape. You think me a poor, weak thing, and not a match for you. But I have a will and strength that you little dream of. I am changed—I am not the same Charlotte. Take care. I warn you."

The visitors' bell rang outside with a loud clang. Both women started. Charlotte swathed her face in her veil again. She advanced two steps, close up to Jenny, and said to her in a harsh whisper—

"*I shall hunt you down yet. There are but two things I live for—to take care of the fatherless, and to——*"

The door Jenny had shut so prudently opened suddenly; and Rachel came to let in master, for it was he who was now returned. Jenny was scared and bewildered. She was frightened by this fierce language, for though the other had not finished what she was saying, Jenny seemed to understand what she meant.

CHAPTER II.

THE INVALID'S GREETING.

WHEN Mr. Maxwell entered, the dark figure passed quickly into the street.

He saw Jenny in the hall, whose colour was quite gone. "You look ill," he said, anxiously. "What is the matter? Quite cold, too," he added, taking her hand. "Come in here—warm yourself. You don't take half enough care, I always tell you."

It was not until some of the generous fluid she had been "ordered" had been taken, that Jenny was quite herself again. She hurried to her room as soon as she could. She did not read any more of the entangled amours of "*Vous et Elle*," but lay back in her chair, with eyes fixed on the ceiling, thinking a good deal.

She was really shocked and frightened by the scene. She felt some terror of that infuriated woman. "She is reckless; she has no command of herself; she will not care how she will injure me, who have never"—Jenny was about to add—"have never injured her," but stopped. She had quite collected the secret of her mourning, the implied death of Mr. Franklyn, the cause and its effect. The match is off, thought Jenny; there has been a general crash—sale—an ejection and turn out—and cheap squalid lodgings.

"Ah!" said Jenny, suddenly, standing up and stamping her raised foot, in a fury, "she is strong, is she? She will hunt me, will she? Let her try it. She has not had

the best of it as yet. And to come into this—into *my* hall,” said Jenny, proudly, “and address her insolent threats to me!” and Jenny walked up and down with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes.

Later on she became dejected. Jenny was of a timorous nature, and trembled at the notion of the angry Charlotte walking about the world and tracking her. But she thought of Charlotte’s training and of her own strength, and grew reassured. But as to the details—the break up—the ejectment—the sale, &c.—and even that death to which Charlotte alluded—(“Ah! I have made her feel,” thought Jenny, “as she made me—once”)—she must learn these forthwith; and after a little thought, she sat down, and wrote a soft, kind letter to the Rev. Mr. Wells, begging earnestly for a line as to the dreadful rumours which had reached her about Grey Forest. She had put it into an envelope, and was thinking again of Charlotte—(fear was now added to dislike, and the combination made her regard her enemy with a curious intensity of feeling)—when she recollected something, and opening her letter again, added a postscript: “P.S.—Something dreadful must have occurred. I have just seen dear Charlotte, who is very wild and odd. Seriously, I fear her brain is *permanently unsettled*. She talked so incoherently. Do, do write quickly, dear “Mr. Wells.” Jenny, as she put up her letter again, said to herself, “That Wells was a sad gossip.”

That night she got back her equanimity; and drawing her reading-table quite close (she always read an hour in bed before going to sleep), followed up the loves of Hector and Marie Therèse for nearly a hundred pages. It was growing exciting, for Hector had proposed to the woman,

whom he idolised until she became his wife, that she should asphyxiate herself over a charcoal stove. She owed him that *amende*, for the cruel tie which she had innocently fastened on him.

The curate wrote by return—four pages crowded close—the fourth crossed. He had been wounded, and sorely stricken by the neglect he had suffered latterly: for Jenny, engrossed by the attentions of so many people, had but little time to devote to him. Yet she had adroitly, at a spare moment, contrived to cast him a sweet morsel or two which kept him from utter starvation. A smile—a look of deep meaning—a secret mystery and mutual confidence—sometimes even of being a victim and object of cruel persecution; still the curate felt it acutely. But now all was forgotten—forgiven: and he wrote in a tumult of joy and with profusion of details.

The late Mr. Franklyn had committed suicide, his affairs had been left in extreme disorder, creditors' demands were pouring in from all sides, and a sale of the furniture and effects of the family might be looked for with certainty.

Miss Charlotte's match was off finally, and he had it from the best sources that Sir Welbore had said, that after that "painful business," it was wholly out of the question. Money might have been got over; but "a stain" like that—it was wholly out of the question.

Wholly out of the question certainly, with a poor, broken outcast and—ejected family. For they had all left.

It was said, indeed, in the neighbourhood, that the dreadful thing known as an execution might be put in at

any moment. Perhaps this was the reason why the family had fled.

The estate and mansion would, it was suspected, be sold eventually, not now, for there were some legal difficulties as to priority, &c. Sold they would be, however, and it was said among the neighbours that Huxley, the *nouveau riche* of the district, had determined to have it, as the last thing wanting to make him a gentleman, and would give a fourth more than any other. The family were in some London suburb,—in some cheap lodging in some cheap street. He would try and ascertain their address if possible, and let dear Miss Bell know by next post. In short a full and satisfactory document, which the curate was a couple of hours writing, and for which, to save the post, it is to be feared he let old Nancy Holden, who was *in extremis*, and who had sent up for him, stand by a little. He, however, saved the post, and reached Nancy's bedside quite time enough to give her a good ten minutes.

Mrs. Maxwell was just about a point between ebb and flow, neither better nor worse; but more querulous, restless, noisy, troublesome than ever. This was the popular voice in the servant world. As she suffered more, she seemed to gather a sort of wakeful strength, and she was always in motion with tongue and eye, asking questions about all things and persons, and nervously watching the door. Nor was she a person who could be a little awed to keep quiet by a gentle authority, as most sick people can, but when she was seized with a thought or notion, it took hold of her; it devoured her, and forced its way out in a thousand jealous questions,—and could only be laid but by reasonable satisfaction. . Then her

affliction was developing ; a cold sword would be plunged in periodically, and made her shriek and scream with the fierce pain. The distinguished physicians came regularly with decent routine, and accepted their reward in the old guilty, surreptitious way, as though they were so many new conscripts, and were being recruited afresh for the Queen's army every day.

Every one in the house and out of it said that poor Mr. Maxwell was sadly to be pitied, he must have such a time of it, was sorely tried, &c. Every one said, that for herself, after all, it would be a happy release,—a view which often occurs to nearly every friend, but the person most interested. Men merely said it was a shame—the women saying it was going on too long—was too much of a good thing. The physicians said it was a thing that might go on for years, or “go out like that !” said Sir Charles, imitating a zephyrus with his mouth ; and this statement produced a general impression abroad of her being on the whole very unreasonable.

Jenny, out of her charity, took the earliest opportunity to tap at her door and go in to see her. The sick, restless woman, leaning on her hand upon a crushed and crumpled pillow, measured her with bright feverish eyes, that looked as though they never closed. They rarely did, for she had but little sleep. Her little guard, or watch-dog, Jacky, sat beside, and the two measured out Jenny hostilely as she approached.

“So you have come back, my lady !”—(she sometimes called Jenny this name, fancying it sarcastic,)—“go away, Jacky dear ; my lady and I want to have a talk together.”

This was her invariable practice ; her sick-woman's

notion of a hint, that it would be a corruption for a child of tender years to hear Jenny's speech. She thought it a deep and cutting stroke. But Jenny only smiled within herself at the poor creature's fatuity.

"So you have come back, my lady," she said again, "to take your proper place in the house, eh? *He* gives it to you—insists upon it, so it must be right, eh?"

"Dear Madam," said Jenny, gently, "you misjudge me sadly; time will help you to take a juster view of these matters."

"Time," said the other, with a laugh; "excellent, quite right: I know you are waiting to see what time will do for you—that is your game, eh?"

"Dearest Madam——"

She was getting more excited.

"You expect to tire me out, eh? Time is your game, eh? And you have him to back you, eh? But I shall live,—yes, I *shall* live! I'll *make* myself live if it costs me torture. I hear things—I know things—I——"

She was sitting up, tossing her head wildly, and worked herself into one of her old states of excitement.

"Hush, hush, dearest Madam! Take care. You forget what the physicians—I had better go, indeed I had. But somehow my presence always seems to have the effect of——"

Jenny stole out, and found Jacky coiled up like a dog at the top of the stairs.

She was beginning to dislike this creature—a goad—he was so plainly ranging himself in the opposite camp. She looked at him sourly.

"You have not said your spelling, Sir, for some time,"

she said; "come down now." And Jenny was laying out in her mind a good page of stiff shingly words, which he should walk over without a stumble, or let him look to it.

"I must go to mamma," he said, obstinately.

"Not now, Sir."

"I must," said he, drawing away slowly, and keeping his eye on her like a mastiff in retreat, "mamma says so."

Jenny's cheeks blazed up.

"Do you dare, Sir?" and she made a step nearer, but he caught the handle of the door.

"I shall call *her*," he said.

Jenny's fingers were longing to tingle on his ear, but the wretch would scream and cause a scene. So she went down determined to bring the matter before Mr. Maxwell.

CHAPTER III.

JENNY'S EXPEDITION.

ONE of these nights she was well forward in the second volume of "Vous et Elle," and getting on, with spurring of her steed, to the close, when her hour came. She was expected below by Mr. Maxwell, in the legal workshop.

The fire was bright, the chair within easy range, the cushions like down; and Jenny's limbs, crossed in her favourite gentlemanly attitude, seemed to enjoy an agreeable lassitude.

With reluctance she rose—even with ill-humour. Another would have made excuse, but Jenny, Sybarite as she was, was too wise to let a mere temporary engagement stand in the way of a greater stake, so she went down in a little ill-humour.

We have mentioned that there was a great change observable in our Jenny of late—a greater calmness and self-possession. She had lost that little air of creeping she once had; she was more independent.

So with a sweet air she told him quietly what a sacrifice she was making, and how little she felt disposed for work and labour that night. But she knew there were important duties to be got through—in short, she was Jenny *à la victime*.

He was shocked; insisted there should be no work. He could do well—for one night it was no matter—and the rest of it. But Jenny was firm, sat at her little

table, got her pens, and began with a calm resolution there was no opposing.

But he felt that there was here a great stretch and compliment, and to accept as a special favour what he had hitherto begun to receive almost as a matter of course. But she did a little personal business that night, too.

She again struck the old chord—her painful position in that house, the odium and dislike that were accumulating on her, and the way the sick woman was treating her. In short, she would be wanting to her self-respect—she owed it to herself and dignity—to not expose herself further to these cruel misconceptions.

“What, again?” said he. “I thought I had effectually stopped this. Sickness does not give these privileges of calumniating the innocent.”

“Indeed,” said Jenny, “I had thought now that she was so much better——”

“Yes,” said he, reflectively, “I *do* think she mends, and is getting stronger every day—so that——”

He felt suddenly that he was saying this in a tone scarcely of rejoicing at the happy change in Mrs. Maxwell’s health. Jenny’s eyes and his met—his were cast down.

“I will speak to her again. Your position in *this*—in my house, must be regarded. You have laid me under obligations of *gratitude*, which I must not forget, never *shall* forget,” he added, a little fervently.

“Still I am not going to turn myself into a pack-horse,” said Jenny to herself, with a smile, as she resumed “*Vous et Elle*,” “for any of them. It is going on

rather too long." She finished it that night before she went to bed.

So a month or more glided by, happily and peacefully. Jenny wrote many letters and received many, notably many, from her admirer, Mr. Wolls. This gentleman furnished her with all details relative to the Franklyn family, and had just sent a choice morsel of news in a hurried postscript that had the air and spasmodic bearing of a telegram. The Franklyn estates were to be sold. The enclosed, a cutting from the local newspaper, to the effect that Mr. Popkins had received instructions to offer for unreserved public competition *all* the rich, rare, and costly furniture, selected by the well-known taste and feeling of the late proprietor, &c. Cards to view would be obtained at Mr. Popkins' establishment.

Everything would be sold, said the auctioneer, with his hand, as it were, on his heart. The old family plate: so many thousand ounces of silver; the "rare" marquetric tables; the "rich" buhl cabinets (in truth, these articles were of a character sadly worn and ill-used, and originally of a poor order); and even the old portraits—an original Canaletto, "exquisitely" painted; a "choice" Wouvermans, "from the collection of the late Cardinal Fesch;" two heads, after Derrer, painted "with great vigour;" and a portfolio of rare etchings and engravings. There were also some choice bits of Sèvres and Dresden figures, two "crackled" china jars, and some other odds and ends. In short, the attention of amateurs, virtuosi, and the cognoscenti generally was respectfully called to this unique opportunity of enriching their collections, which might never occur again.

This was all mere varnish, I am afraid. We have already seen specimens of the thousand ounces of plate in the twisted, spiral-shaped, wiry-looking branch candlesticks which ornamented the dining-table of the late Mr. Franklyn, at the first scene with which this story opened. There was an article of furniture, too, partially described as a "massive" sideboard by the same friendly hand, which we have also seen before; but which, with its sharp, spiked legs, seemed a lean and slippered pantaloon of a sideboard.

Jenny read of all these articles, and recognised them; for Mr. Wells, the curate, had good-naturedly forwarded her a copy of the catalogue. The estates, with all the royalties, rights of fishing, hawking, turbary, and general "easements" thereunto appertaining, were to be "set up" in London by a grander firm than Mr. Popkins'—Messrs. Saltmarshe, Robins, and Co., whose programmes sometimes covered a large space of ground in the leading journal, closely ranged in file. "Unless," it was added, "disposed of previously by private contract."

More news, too, concerning the family. Young Craven was considered by the neighbourhood to have behaved "shabbily;" to have skulked out of his engagements under the paternal *Ægis*. But it was known at the same time that the Baronet was in his house as the Autocrat of all the Russias, and would send his son to the mines, or to Siberia—that is, would disinherit him ruthlessly—if he dared to gainsay his imperial will. There was much excuse, therefore, for the young man: since he, as the saying is, could not help himself.

Another three weeks:—Mrs. Maxwell, still endued with an unnatural vitality, beginning to eat with a

curious appetite; and yet, in that heart direction, much the same. Some ligament or string was getting finer and finer every day, and would snap some morning. Still the day nor hour not known.

Jenny beginning to find this life a little languid, after her late excitement, and growing almost feverish in her wish for news of the Franklyn family. The curate wrote; they were in London somewhere; still in an obscure suburb, but could not name it. He said it seemed to be made a mystery of.

Jenny was not pleased; a new idea had occurred to her. She wrote him what might be called a lonely letter, in low spirits, as it were; no friends—cast adrift in the vast London world—with no one but him to lean upon. He very often came up, she was given to understand—passed through (where had our Jenny learnt this?)—would he give her a call, as he had done *once*? It would be a charity, as she wanted him to help her a little, in one respect.

What was the result? Enraptured curate scrapes together his little money—borrows more from a parishioner, and flies up to Babylon by the night's train. It was his sermon day on the next Sunday, and this was Saturday. But he wrote a hasty note to his superior, excusing himself.

He was in Chesterfield Street the next day. Jenny saw him in Mr. Maxwell's study—saw him for nearly an hour. She was delightful, and he was enraptured.

How long would he stay? Only a day or two? Jenny's face fell.

She had hoped—but no matter—it could not be helped.

Enraptured curate will stay any number of days—weeks—months if necessary.

He had got traces of the Franklyns, very cleverly, and would work it all out. Return to-morrow.

He returned on the morrow. The poor wretch had been about half the night in the drenching rain. He had heard of some line of country called Little Grosvenor Villas; and, as he could not afford cabs, he had gone exploring until near one o'clock in the morning; splashing and paddling in mud and dirt, rain, and general misery. There were many Little Grosvenor Villas, all at opposite quarters; and the poor ordained tramp had a wretched time, but found it at last by diligent inquiry at a small grocer's shop.

He came the next day to Jenny, husky and coughing—his throat lined with files—but triumphant.

"I have found them," he said.

Jenny's face lightened with joy, and her hands moved instinctively under her chin, as though she were tying the strings of her bonnet.

He came back in the evening by appointment, and Jenny, already dressed, went out with him.

Little Grosvenor Villas was miles—literally miles—away. Jenny was no tramp, so curate calls a cab. "A Hansom!" murmurs Jenny; and they get in and roll away. Hansom bounds and springs along with the easy motion of a cricket-ball. Poor curate! he is silent for a time, thinking how this jaunt will consume such little silver as he has.

It takes them an hour—through the City—through blocked streets—with ten minutes of patient waiting at a time. Jenny is pleasant and amusing on her journey,

lolling back, with Turkish ease, and says she could live in a Hansom.

At last they are set down in the district. Curate is fumbling for his little silver; but Jenny says sweetly, "Let him wait. Pay him now, dear Mr. Wells—but let him wait. But stay——" and she made as though she would take out her purse; at which the curate, in eager protest, poured out his silver desperately into Hansom's hand, and walked away with Jenny.

They found the house—lodgings—mean gentility lodgings—clean, but reduced. The house had the same air of secret suffering under respectable clothing, that a reduced person—say a lady turned governess—has under a genteel suit of apparel. It was small and contracted.

Jenny drew near cautiously, and stood before the hall-door. It was growing dark, and they were lighting the street lamps. She looked up to the first-floor windows. There were no blinds; then she crossed over with the curate, and stood on the opposite flagging to get a better view.

She could see into the drawing-room, for there were candles lit, and she could make out black figures sitting hopeless at the fire. Jenny looked very long, and never answered her companion when he spoke to her.

"We ought to go in," he said; "poor things, they would take it as a charity."

"Would she?" said Jenny, coldly; she did not say "they." "We haven't time, we must get back; let us find out the number." And she crossed the street again, and went up to the little door—Ten was the number.

As they were turning away, the door suddenly opened

and some one came out. Jenny hastily walked on, but the gentleman followed them a little way, and then, as it were satisfied, turned away in a secret manner down another street. Jenny, deeply veiled, said softly to her friend, "He knows us; it is young Mr. Craven. How stupid! he will tell them."

Jenny was really provoked, and said this a little testily, and, by a tone in her words, seemed to convey that it was his fault. Here was the Hansom waiting, and Jenny's sweet voice came back to her. She enjoyed her ride, so "Make him drive fast, dear Mr. Wells," said she. "Isn't the motion delightful?" And the driver aloft scourged his beast with his long whip. At the top of the street, Jenny stopped it, and tripped out. "She was *so* obliged. Oh, *could* he come again some other time? It was *such* a treat to her. She was *so* lonely. He must come to Chesterfield Street. He should know Mr. Maxwell—would he dine with them some day? No, no," added Jenny, dismissing the idea sorrowfully, "it would be no use asking you; we won't mention *that* again," added Jenny, with meaning, as though there was some old legend or history which effectually barred Mr. Wells being asked to a family meal.

She left him to adjust the fare with the Hansom driver, who, seeing that he had to do with a soft-minded clergyman, played the bravo and bludgeon man. He got down fiercely, when the curate mildly demurred. "What, do you suppose I'm to be distressin' my 'oss for you and your young 'oman, all for this? You ought to be ashamed on yourself to offer it." Becoming more furious, our curate gave way, and presented him with a very large testimonial. Poor soul! he would make it up by

a slender repast—a ghostly dinner at a counter—a fiction of a dinner, whose proper name was lunch.

Jenny seemed to be sadly disturbed by this visit. At home she sat long before the fire ruminating, and beat her foot impatiently. She had thought all was over with that Craven alliance; and here was this manly youth, under cover of night, and, no doubt in defiance of his family, skulking away to see the impoverished family and their pauper house. Were Jenny older and more mature she might have thought it her painful duty to put his relations on their guard. But to do her justice she did not entertain the notion a moment. Perhaps it was because something else occurred to her.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INTERVIEW.

JENNY had made a few friends for herself in this vast lonely, lonely London. Among others she had attracted the notice of the Reverend Hewlett Pole, M.A., vicar of the parish church which Jenny frequented. This gentleman was struck by her devout bearing on Sundays, and the beautiful “abstraction,” as he called it, which characterised her manner of devotion. He knew something of Mr. Maxwell, and hoped that she would “assist them” with the catechism and other parochial matters. The Rev. Hewlett had, indeed, a sort of private legion of parish virgins under his command, whom he was fond of “training,” and he promptly enlisted Jenny.

The work, I am afraid, was scarcely suited to one of Jenny's temperament. She had been in the habit of devoting her Sabbaths to strict retirement in her chamber; for on Saturdays, usually came home one of M. Bernardi's delightful boxes. A Sunday or two she *did* go and parade at the Reverend Hewlett Pole's morning drill: but it did not suit. She told her clerical colonel very gently and plaintively that she was afraid she could not come very often, and when pressed by that officer, hinted that the ladies of the regiment made her feel uncomfortable. Perhaps they did. And the statement was, in fact, true; for during the exercises Jenny *did* feel uncomfortable.

Mr. Maxwell knew of it, and approved of her going; but Jenny, when she had suspended her duties, did not care to mention it to him. She therefore went out every Festival very much about the old hour—as if to the old place. At dinner, sometimes, Mr. Maxwell asked her how she had got on—a question she either did not hear, through a fit of coughing, or through a sudden question of her own occurring to her; or if these two resources failed her, by a sweet and mournful shaking of her head, and a sudden change of subject. This mode of reply often mystified Mr. Maxwell, who used to translate it into something unpleasant having occurred, which it would be too painful to dwell upon further.

On many little expeditions therefore went Jenny, even on week-days, which were understood to have reference to the Rev. H. Pole, and his parish business. Jenny tripped away lightly, at all hours deeply veiled and alone, and was often looked long after wistfully by predatory gentlemen as she floated by them. On the

morning after her little expedition with Mr. Wells, she went out betimes, that is, between eleven and twelve, stepped briskly across the park, got into St. James's Street, and fluttered about the region found at the bottom of that settlement of clubs. She looked at those stately buildings with wonder and curiosity. For she had heard young Craven describe their interior state and splendour, and more specially dwell on the private magnificence of his own, the Junior Conservative,—their marbles and mirrors, ottomans and velvets, and smoking-rooms, and cook, M. Salmi, whom the "Rag" had tried to steal from them, by dishonourable private offers. "The Rag?" said Jenny, bewildered, and wished the origin of that curious and rather degrading *sobriquet* to be explained to her. Explained to her also, was the system of young Craven's club life. How he had lodgings just by—"the finest" in the quarter. "Old Venterby wrote from the country, just a day late! Jove! I heard he nearly burst a blood-vessel with rage!"

Jenny thought of this little legend, as she wandered about listlessly. She kept close to a cab-stand, and held her little purse in her hand. Suddenly, and with a little hurry, she accosted a driver of one of these vehicles, and timidly asked the fare to Temple Bar. Curious to say, as she put this question, a gentleman who had been coming along the street, stopped beside her, and called out, "Halloo! Miss Bell taking a cab!"

Jenny was near fainting, and dropped her little purse. The youth picked it up.

"Well, Miss Bell," said young Craven, "where do you wish to go to?"

"Oh, it's no matter now," said Jenny, hurriedly—she

was quite scared, poor child ! "I must go home—good-bye, Mr. Craven !" and Jenny began to move.

"*Must* you go ? " said he. "Very well—glad to have seen you. I have not breakfasted yet."

His manner was cold, and Jenny said within herself that *something* had changed him. She bit her lip, and walked away hastily, and without turning her head. Her cheek flushed, and she spoke to herself, as she walked fast. As she turned into the park, she heard footsteps behind her, as of some one running :—young Craven was beside her.

"I—I—wanted to ask you," he said,—“it is so curious not having seen you for so long—how you have been,—what has become of you ? ”

Jenny looked round, with mystery and alarm, as though they were engaged in a deed of guilt.

"Oh, Mr. Craven——" she said.

He looked round also. "Well !" he said—then went on. "I saw you last night," he said, "though you didn't see me. I was seeing that poor family, and that brave girl Charlotte."

He looked steadily at Jenny. Jenny cast down her eyes.

"Poor—poor girl !" she said. "Though she does hate me ! "

He gave a curious smile. "I believe," he said, "on the contrary——"

"Do not let us speak of it," said Jenny, with growing agitation. "I shall never forget it—that scene—that terrible scene ! "

"Scene !—what scene ? "

"Oh, she told you," said Jenny, nervously—"of course

she did. She tells *you* everything. It shattered my nerves dreadfully. Let us speak of something else—quickly now——”

“No; but tell me,” he said: “have you seen Charlotte?”

“She came to our house,” said Jenny, in a low trembling voice, “and there—sent up for me, and in the hall—our own hall—*assailed* me, oh, so cruelly—so grossly—so unjustly. Oh! oh!” said Jenny, trying with her round hand to shut out the picture. “But I should make allowance. I think she knew not what she was doing.”

“I never heard of this,” said young Craven, musingly.

“She thought,” said Jenny, excitedly, “that I was, in some remote way—that seemed to be the delusion—the cause of dear darling Mr. Franklyn’s end—my kind friend—my best benefactor!” And Jenny lifted up her eyes devoutly to heaven. “But,” she added sweetly, “you always said so—you found it out, I don’t know how, the first day—I did not believe you. I confess it now—I did not know of your penetration. You told me—you warned me!”

“Well,” said he, complacently, “I thought I saw some little prejudice against you.”

“Oh, had I taken your advice in other things. But no matter now.” (What was this precious counsel given by young Craven?) “I have no one here in vast weary London to counsel or direct me. Happy those who have. Happy those who are spared the cruel stroke of secret slander. Yes,” said Jenny, vehemently, “she has slandered me to you. You know she has. She has repeated those vile things. I am no hypocrite, I do not like her.

I can see that she has turned *you* against me. Naturally *you* trust her. You are guided by her ; why not ? She is to be your bride. But I am no hypocrite, and cannot forgive her."

All this Jenny poured out in a vehement stream of mingled agitation, and at the end even of hysterical sobs.

"Don't, dont," said young Craven, looking round. "I assure you, you are mistaken, you are indeed. You take this matter far too seriously. I am in the habit, as *you* know," he added with pride, "of judging for myself. I don't take my opinions second-hand."

"Good-bye," said Jenny, hurriedly. "I must go. I *dare* not wait. Good-bye. I shall not see you again for years perhaps. But if I thought you had so base an opinion——"

"I assure you," said he, "it is quite a delusion on your part. But tell me, where do you——?"

"I must go, I must go," said Jenny, releasing herself. They were close to the park gate now. "Only tell me this. If ever—if ever—I have *no* friends, you know—if ever I should want a *little* advice, to direct me in an emergency—*may* I—*may* I—just write, and—could you spare me one line ? It would be *so* precious."

"Good gracious, yes," said young Craven, impetuously, "to be sure. But I shall see you again before long. Tell me, where do you——?"

"Hush, hush," said Jenny, "I dare not. And promise me this—if I *may* exact a little promise—I shall not see you again——"

"Certainly," said young Craven ; "but good gracious, I tell you I shall."

Promise me not to speak of me to *her*. It somehow degrades me. I can't bear to think of it after the dreadful scene—now good-bye. Thanks!”

And Jenny fluttered away.

Young Craven stood looking after her till she had crossed the street and turned out of Piccadilly. He then looked round him, hesitated a moment, and followed cautiously. Jenny could not see.

But she could not see also some one that was running home before her, a little boy, who suddenly turned down by the Mews behind Chesterfield Street, and got into Mr. Maxwell's house by the stables.

When Jenny entered, she was met at the door by her maid Rachel.

“Oh Miss! Oh Miss!” said that attendant, “such a business. Master was looking for you everywhere.”

Jenny was perturbed.

“What is it, Rachel? anything happened?”

“Didn't you hear, Miss—not expected to live out the day?”

“What! what!” said Jenny hastily, a curious light coming into her eyes. “I must go up.”

“No, no, it's master's father, Miss. He was telegraphed for this morning, and is gone away half-an-hour ago; just caught the train.”

Stupid maid! and yet it was not her fault. Jenny was in a flutter. She presently was told more particulars, and found a little hasty note directed to her by Mr. Maxwell. His father, a man nearly eighty years old, was *in extremis*. In the course of nature, he could not be expected to last more than a few days. He hoped she would take care of herself during his absence, and

deny herself nothing. He would telegraph to her any news.

That very night at ten o'clock, when she was thinking of retiring to rest, a telegram came. All was over. At seven o'clock the old man had expired, and the sender of the message was now Sir Frederick Maxwell, Q.C., Bart., and the sick lady up stairs was Lady Maxwell.

Jenny looked at the characters with additional interest and reverence. Her eyes sparkled, her cheeks flushed up, and she began to pace the room, as she always did when she was castle-building. She did not go to bed for an hour later, and when she did, it was with a pleasant smile on her lips. Her dreams were very light that night.

CHAPTER V.

ADVICE AND OPINION.

NEXT day, towards evening, returned Sir Frederick Maxwell, Bart. He had a "heavy" Case, which he dare not neglect, for any filial or mortuary duties, and had arranged to go back for the funeral. That ceremonial took place in due course, and with befitting state, down at Brighton, where the old Baronet had died. It was conducted with a weight of crape, and abundance of odious sweeping brushes, disguised in black, and the scorbutic mourning mutes, which decency and grief insist on. Thus matters fell into the old channel, and Sir Frederick, who made no pretence of deep grief, was at his law labours again.

Jenny, it was noted by Rachel the maid and others.

seemed to be more assiduous than usual after the ministrations of the Reverend Hewlett Pole; going up, as it was believed, every second or third day in that parochial direction. She took the Park road, but generally strayed off a little down in the direction of the palace, and which was indeed the road that led towards the Rev. H. Pole's district. Somewhere in this direction she found her field of missionary labour, performed it, whatever it was, and returned home. The time selected was usually in the grey of the winter evening, between four and five o'clock. And curious to say, almost always a young boy took advantage of her absence to steal out by the back of Chesterfield Street, by the Mews, and was home always a few minutes before her.

Jenny was not so diligent in her legal clerkship as of old. Her master's eyes had mended prodigiously, and he was growing strong. Still he insisted on her old service in the study, and Jenny's protestations were overruled. The old form of having one of the children down as watch-dog was jealously insisted on by Jenny, at least up to ten o'clock at night, after which hour the formula was dispensed with, and her scruples seemed satisfied; she called it, however, "the Drawing-Room"—a characteristic little *salvo*, and it quieted Jenny's conscience.

But it has been mentioned that Jenny had grown more independent and composed in her manner. She and Sir Frederick Maxwell very often suspended legal labour altogether for an hour, and the man of law took counsel of the girl of sense. She gave it cheerfully and with surprising wisdom. He said she had more sense than half the fellows at "the Bar." There was Boljoye, a Queen's counsel, with a bag distended as was his own

person ; and Boshley, and Rasher, who had got, Heaven knows how, to be a serjeant. "I declare, Jenny," said he—he had come to call her Jenny—"I would sooner have your view than the whole of theirs put together."

There was no affectation of grief for the old baronet. Within a week the new one was talking him over with Jenny in his study.

"He left us very little," he said ; "he had not much to leave, though. Ten thousand will be the outside. You know, though we are baronets we are landless—not a rood. My poor father was sold out forty years ago. That is the reason I am here in this study with these papers before me."

Jenny sighed.

"By the way, you must advise me with that long, sensible little head of yours. How much do you suppose I have put by ? I tell you everything, you know."

Jenny smiled, but could not tell—could not even dream—could not guess.

"Well, say eight thousand pounds." This was said with great hesitation, as if fearful of offending.

Mr. Maxwell laughed.

"You must think me a very poor young man," he said, "not to have more to show than that. No. I have laboured hard and spent little. The house costs next to nothing, thanks to the thrifty mistress—I mean housekeeper." (Jenny confused at this mistake.) "No ; what would you say to five-and-twenty thousand ?"

Jenny gave a little scream ; it *really* took her by surprise.

"What a *deal* of money !" she said, artlessly. "Oh dear, what a deal !"

"Now," he said "the question is, what is to be done with it? It has been resting in the funds long enough. I'll not wait any longer to add more to it. What do you say? Case for Miss Bell's advice and opinion! . Fee, a new shawl." What do you say to a new Indian shawl?"

Jenny took no notice, but began to reflect. She took up a stray roll of briefs and wrote on its face carelessly, then handed it over to him.

He read,—"*Buy an estate.*"

"Excellent," said he. "Rasher often gets twenty guineas for a worse opinion."

"For, say forty thousand pounds," said Jenny, with an air of quiet reflection, "a fair bit of land could be got. An old baronetcy and no land is a gentleman without a coat. It is incomplete," said Jenny; "it has no root."

"No settlement, as we say in the law. Excellent! I'll do it."

"You can add to it as you get more money. Buy bits here, and bits there, as the fees increase, then get into parliament; no barrister is in full practice unless he is retained by a constituency."

"Good," said he, stopping before her and taking her hand. "You are a very clever creature, Jenny," (Jenny released herself hastily.) "I have made up my mind; it shall be. We shall buy our land; we shall look out for a suitable thing; we shall go down; we shall build there; you shall choose the furniture; you shall choose the county, the town, everything; you shall ——" Suddenly he stopped.

Jenny rose up.

"It is time to say good-night," she said, and fluttered away like a dove to her nest.

Next morning, when the Barrister was gone to court, a clergyman, who had been skulking suspiciously about the street, came up, and asked to see Miss Bell—"Please say, the Rev. Charlton Wells." He was shown into the "drawing-room," and Jenny came down to him. She was sweet and affectionate.

"You have news for me, I know," she said, with simplicity. "You have heard something more about them. Dear Mr. Wells, you are so kind—so good-natured."

He was gratified with these praises—the poor clerical jackal!—and proceeded with complacency to tell his story. He had seen the girls yesterday—Charlotte was out. They were delighted, poor things, and were very open and confiding. Charlotte, they told him, had great hopes that something was going to happen. Old Cousin John Hall had written kindly, and would soon be coming over. They had got a benevolent man of law, who was looking into their affairs, and would try to set them straight; and Charles—dear Charles—

Jenny started from her seat.

"Does *he* go much to them?" she asked, with a curl upon her lip.

He had been there only the evening before. He had told them he was sure in *time* Sir Welbore would come round—that is, in time.

Jenny beat her foot upon the ground, and did not speak; then got up and began to pace the room, according to her favourite habit.

"You—you told me," she said, a little tartly, "that it was all at an end for ever. How could you have made such a mistake? You see there is nobody I can depend on—not one—all the same!"

The curate was confounded at this attack. "I thought," he faltered, "you would be delighted. Your friend, you know—and—"

Jenny laughed. "Of course—of course," she said, "we understand that." But I am very much harassed on all sides. Dear Mr. Wells, forgive me. You who are so good, so generous, so useful to me."

The poor jackal took her hand reverently, and bent his glowing cheek over it. He was overcome by these praises. Jenny dismissed him, for she had a little scheme in her restless head she wanted to carry out forthwith. But mind—he must come and see her again.

Poor jackal ! His money was gone, and he was in debt for lodgings. He had made a faint resolve to rush home on the morrow, for his superior was calling for him imperiously, but he now must stay.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FRANKLYNS' PROBATION.

THE poor outcast Franklyns—in all the misery of grief and straitened means combined—were wretched enough in their mean lodgings in the London suburbs. Grief makes no account of surrounding luxury; the softest pillows, to moisten with tears, and the most delicate and soothing ministrations—these are about as little regarded as the gilding and mirrors of a transatlantic steamer in the agonies of sea-sickness. And yet take these comforts away, and how much the bitterness of private sorrow is intensified. And this is the special misery that generally waits upon a father's loss: for usually accompanying the natural grief, comes a crowd of sad troubles—a general uprooting—a rush of demands, and possibly a sudden bursting out of a whole conflagration of difficulties and dangers, smouldering for years, and which the skilful hand, now motionless, was alone able to control.

In their little lodging, and with a little purse, which was running out as steadily and inevitably as sands in an hour-glass, were the Franklyns, miserable together. They were about as wretched as they could well be. Over them hung the memory of the late dreadful act, like a mephitic exhalation—that dreadful end which, not many years before, would have been marked for public reprobation by a stake, and bed of quicklime, at cross roads. They had no hope. Their dear loved Grey Forest was to be sold—sold, with all the attendant roughness to be expected from men who knew that it could not meet their

just demands. These poor girls themselves had to come in contact with rude surly men of law, and with, to them, the dreadful courtesies of sheriffs' men, and demoralised executives of the civil power. There was no one to help them. Their brother had been long in some foreign settlement, and would not hear the news for a month to come. Mr. Crowle, the late man of business to the family, Charlotte had dismissed, with a shudder. She had a dim impression that he was some way associated with the late catastrophe, and could not endure his presence. He had suddenly cast his smooth, glistening skin, and assumed a new manner of insolence. But Charlotte did not fear him. Still, he was a large creditor of the late Mr. Franklyn.

Everyone knew that the Craven alliance was now at an end: that Sir Welbore had solemnly and decidedly pronounced that "the thing could not be—was out of the question—was—er—most inconvenient—but, still, not to be thought of. There was something—er—really—so *unpleasant* in that—er—affair—of the late Mr. Franklyn's. No—it could not even be thought of. And so," said the Baronet to his son, "you will be good enough to—er—wipe the whole thing out of your mind."

That son was of a curious temper. He had a kind of chivalrous sense in him, which I believe came of reading modern novels; and, just as he could write fine adoration "To Ianthe" and "To Medora," there was sometimes a poetic chord touched among the motives which directed his actions. And thus the idea of he—the brave, gallant Squire Craven, standing by that gentle, stricken girl in her distress—soothing and comforting her, in despite of all the menaces of a despotic father seemed

something noble ; indeed, it quite filled the mind of that brave knight. And so he paid them conspirator-like visits, and was really kind and enthusiastic, and helped them in many ways.

Charlotte was a firm woman ; she knew the dangers and difficulties, the hopeless obstacles, and plainly told him it was all at an end. He was distracted for the time being, and thought himself miserable : but was very happy. That little tendency towards our Jenny was but a spasm, as indeed was his present emotion. And it is to be suspected Charlotte had this impression. And indeed, it may be said, that although she liked him with but a mild and subdued regard, and in a great measure inclined to him but for the sake of her family, his was a mind, as has been seen, infinitely below hers.

On Charlotte's brain rested the whole burden. They had now a little store of money, but that would be soon washed away. She wrote to the "Cousin Hall," at Dieppe, who had spoken so generously, telling him of their state—wrote, it must be said, with repugnance, but she was making many more bitter sacrifices, and told him of their state. But it would seem that the news of their misfortune had damped his sympathies—an effect not uncommon with such news—and he never answered. An old bachelor, fond of comforts, he had of course naturally reckoned on the arm-chairs and firesides of Grey Forest—on the gardens and glades of Grey Forest—on the old wines of Grey Forest—and not on the meagre accommodation of small hired lodgings. This was but human nature, and human nature sent no answer, and perhaps changed its mind.

Charlotte thought of the old universal plank in woman's

shipwreck—the genteel spar the suddenly distressed girl clings to—taking office as a governess. The delusion is, that no qualifications are required, save having possibly been *under* a governess. Any gentle girl, who can dress neatly write a little pale, neat hand, do a little German, a little French, and much piano—here are all the qualifications. Any one can teach. The old infatuation goes on, and when the family in sad solemn council have debated, and with tears and much grief have determined that one at least—not more—shall be sacrificed to this cruel trade, the whole is considered as accomplished.

Charlotte, with far better qualifications than many of her kind—and who would really have grown into an admirable teacher—turned her mind seriously to this plan. Poor child! What a world of flutter and anxiety she made of these little rooms! For she went through the old procedure—a little squeezed and wrung from daily wants, and expended in advertising. Advertising in the great leading journal, who huddled away her modest statement of her qualifications among a whole mob of such things in the great Champs de Mars of the Supplement. It brought her no profit; she was lost, swallowed up—but they watched the post anxiously. Charlotte tried again: couched it—much against her will—in a more dramatic shape, and received two proposals: one, no salary, but board; to find herself in washing, &c.; scrupulously clean; attend family prayers;—after a few years (possibly, when the education was finished) a salary might be thought of. The other was wholly unsuited. Poor Charlotte!

She struggled on; however, and the severest struggle

of all was the shamming of hope and cheerfulness for the sake of her sisters. But her heart was sinking, for she absolutely saw *no* issue. She wrote again to Cousin Hall—and again there came no answer. She looked at her little purse, and saw the yellow waters oozing away slowly. That little well would be dry in another week. Add to this, she had a dreadful presentiment that she was going to be ill. For at times she felt strange shiverings, and an odd sense about her head. This thought filled her with alarm, and then, only then, did her spirits really sink, for an illness would indeed be her final crushing blow. So, desperately and in despair, she, as it were, scourged all such symptoms away, and refused to entertain them. But it was no use.

She had given up the advertising, and had taken to walking over London. She had consulted those strange offices where they send home such things as teachers to order, as other shops do other articles—and furnished with references, had been calling at houses, and walking miles in dirt—very often in rain. That is, coming back; for on going, it would have interfered with a genteel appearance. These things repeat themselves over and over again—and will repeat themselves to the end. We know how she fared about as well as though she came in and sat down and told the whole story: the story of the timid knock, the suspicious servant, the gentle voice trembling as it states its “business,” the interrogation in the drawing-room, and the “sorry it won’t do,” and final retreat down stairs in the humiliation of repulse. Charlotte went through all this until her sense of shame became blunted, and came home every evening wet, sinking, beaten, hopeless, and despairing.

Worse than all—she was growing ill—the symptoms would not be scourged away. Worse than all—she was losing heart and vigour to repel them, and finally one evening gave in utterly—became formally ill. A sort of low heat or fever which she said only required a little rest, and upon the sofa she proceeded to take that rest.

CHAPTER VII.

AN APPARITION.

THAT evening, at the other side of London, when Jenny went down to her work, she found Sir Frederick Maxwell looking into a tin box of papers that had just arrived “for advice and opinion.”

“Here is something that will interest you,” he said. “You will be sorry to see these. Here are the Franklyn mortgages which a creditor’s solicitor has sent me to look over.”

Jenny sighed and looked sad.

“I knew,” he said, “you would be grieved, but what can we do? We are mere workmen, and must take every ‘job’ that is offered to us.”

“Oh,” said Jenny, “how dreadful! and—what are you to do with these?” she asked, curiously.

“Why, it seems,” he said, “that the place is to be sold.”

“Sold!” said Jenny in despair.

“Yes; and when an estate is to be sold, in rush the creditors from the east and west, and struggle who shall be first—legally, I mean. This fellow is a mortgagee,

and wishes to be first ; and when I say fellow, I believe it is some widow in France."

He then sat down and began to go over the papers, and Jenny, who had proclaimed that she was "suffering" (in some direction not distinctly announced) drew her chair close to the fire, looked at the coals and thought—thought deeply. Many shades of expression passed over her face, and a dozen sarcastic phrases seemed to have been uttered by her lips. Those had a language of their own. The Baronet, who at first looked over at her now and again, gradually got absorbed in his work.

What was Jenny busy with ? Was she doing battle—moral—with a secret enemy ? Was she crushing that secret enemy, or being^o flung back in her turn ? Now hoping, now despairing ; now triumphant, now defeated. There was, indeed, a desponding expression in her face, and perhaps she thought she was far away from victory. But she loved excitement, and, above all, the excitement of a battle.

"Very strange, and really most curious !" came from the study table, of which Jenny took no notice, being busy with her conflict, and taking it as some exciting light on, say the theory of remainders. There was an interval of a quarter of an hour more. The barrister was flinging over the stiff crackling parchment sheets hastily, taking a compendious view of it all. He then stood up.

"It is so—exactly what I thought ! What do you say to this, Jenny ?"

Jenny looked round.

"There has been some strange work here," he said. "I hope it won't do harm to your friends, but there is

something very queer about these papers. Some of these deeds seem to be manufactured."

Jenny gave a cry—of surprise perhaps.

"Manufactured?" she said.

"Manufactured, or spoliated, or forged," said he. "It is an ugly word. Tell me," continued he, "your friend, Mr. Franklyn, was in difficulties before his death, was he not?"

"Oh yes—yes," said Jenny, mournfully, "all his life."

"Ah—thought so—always raising money."

"Always, always," said Jenny, still sadly.

"Found it hard to get latterly, I suppose."

"Exactly," said Jenny; "in fact *could* not get it."

"Oh, it is quite plain. I am afraid I see the whole thing. He must have had some old deeds by him, and got some friendly person who did not care about the exact legal part of the transaction to lend him the money on the security of these old papers. See, Jenny," he added, opening one out, "these sheets in the middle are mere sheets taken at random; they don't even follow; and he had the first pages engrossed freshly—a most clumsy thing altogether."

"Oh yes," said Jenny, "I recollect now—perfectly," and she *did* recollect the bundle of clean deeds with the blank spaces she had lighted on the day they were turning over the papers at Grey Forest.

"What do you recollect, Jenny?" said the barrister, with interest.

"So clever! such an instinct!" said Jenny, as though the praise escaped her; and with difficulty the story was wrung from her.

"It just confirms my view," said he. "The wretched

man was driven to extremity, and then ventured on this rash step. Possibly it was the fear of detection drove him to his fatal act."

"Oh yes," said Jenny, "how dreadful! And his poor family."

"Yes, and the poor—widow I think she is described," said he, looking at the back of the deed—"Hannah Martin, who advanced her three thousand pounds on that worthless security. That is very dreadful too, dear Jenny."

Jenny was *accablée*—prostrated—at the image of the widow.

"And the person whose name has been used," he went on—"let me see—Long—Colonel Long, of Barrow Hall, Northamptonshire, and now living at Avignon, France. He took care to lay the venue," said the barrister, using the phrase of his profession, "a long way off—the poor miserable man. Well, it must all come out now."

Jenny gave a spasm and a short cry.

"I am truly sorry," he said, compassionately, "as they are your friends. I know you will feel it as acutely as any one of them. I must send for the solicitor—the solicitor of the unfortunate widow—to-morrow."

Another spasm escaped Jenny.

"It looks," he went on, "as if they had some suspicion, or were uneasy about it, by their sending it to me."

He tossed the papers back into their tin case again, and took up another bundle. He spread it out with the usual barristerial artistic touch, and began to read.

But he was absent. He was a quarter of an hour over a page. Jenny was smiling to herself at the fire.

Suddenly he turned round.

"You have been at Grey Forest," he said, "and know it well?"

"The sweetest, loveliest spot in the world! But I shall never see it again," said Jenny, hopelessly. "Never! Oh! that is all over!"

"There is no knowing," he said, smiling. "Now—prepare for a surprise—what would you say to *buying* it—to *our* buying it?"

"Buying it!" said Jenny, starting from her chair.

"Yes," he continued, still smiling, "absolutely buy it, in fee, with all the rights, easements, and appurtenances. It would just do—would suit *us*, I think, exactly" (he leant a little on the word *us*). "And then I was thinking also, as they were such dear kind friends, this awkward business of the deeds would be staved off, and they would be saved from exposure. I knew it would delight you."

But Jenny, who had looked delighted at the first part of the plan, became desponding at this second view. She shook her head mournfully. "It would not do; there were grave objections. Such a sacrifice for *her*. Oh! never!"

He became earnest.

"Yes, Jenny, it must be so. I have taken a fancy to the place. You like it, and I am sure I shall. I dare say it will be got cheap; and you shall have these horrible deeds handed over to you to bring to your friends, to burn together, and do what you like with."

Again her face brightened ; this was more feasible.

"They are to be given to *me*. Oh ! how good ! how kind ! how generous !"

"Not at all. I would do," added he, in a low voice, "far more than that for you, and I hope eventually——"

He stopped. Jenny kept her eyes on the ground cautiously, and waited for more, but he did not go on.

"Yes," he continued, "we shall all go down to Grey Forest ; build a fine mansion ; shut up this odious workshop ; and be gentlemen and ladies."

Jenny smiled sadly.

"You will all be very happy."

"We ! Yes ; and you, too, Jenny."

"No, no !" said Jenny, lifting her eyes, "no, no, no ! my path must be in another direction—that Paradise is not for me."

"But it shall be for you—it is *all* for you—it is——"

"All for me ?" said Jenny.

"Yes, all for you. You shall be queen and reign at Grey Forest. It shall be your kingdom. Truly, it is no sin to lay out a little happiness for ourselves at one time of our lives. You know what mine has been—what a slave's life. In bondage to this master" (touching some law books), "and to——"

He pointed up. Did Jenny understand him ? But she never lifted her eyes.

"Why should I conceal it ? Surely that poor, delicate, ailing woman up stairs, who has lain all her life at the very edge of a grave—*she* has not been a wife to me. Is it ~~stupid~~ to look forward to a time when she shall be released from a tie that has been misery to her and

wretchedness to me? I have borne it patiently. I have never risen up against the yoke. Even now I can wait, and look forward, as I ask you to do, Jenny, that is" — and he paused—"if you have—if you can feel as——"

Jenny was scared, fluttered, frightened, as she heard this disclosure. He, too, was agitated, and was waiting for her to speak.

Jenny's voice took the shape of a murmur, rather than of words. Just at that moment the door opened suddenly, and a strange, ghastly-looking figure, with a light in its hand, stood in the doorway motionless.

She was wrapped in a shawl. Her hair was disordered, and her eyes had a strange light in them. Her lips and cheeks were moving in spasms, as if she was trying to speak. The pair trembled before her.

She lifted her long, wasted arm, wrapped in the shawl's fold, and it fell again to her side.

"I have heard you," she said at last, "I have been listening—I have heard it all. *This* is your plan—is it?" and the wretched lady, who seemed as if she were wrapped in grave clothes instead of a shawl, looked from one to the other with wild eyes, and a chest that sank and heaved with strange rapidity. "This is your plan!" she repeated, in a key that rose steadily—"her scheme too!—But I know it—I know it."

The two had not courage to say a word. They were trembling.

"So you were settling it all together! Which of you was to do the work? Oh! Heaven help ~~me~~ your mercy here—miserable creature that I am! But I shall

never sleep—never ! I shall watch all night long ; and if you come—if *she* comes, I shall scream, and rouse the whole city.”

She was, indeed, doing that at the moment ; and the barrister, recovering himself a little, made a step forward—

“Come, come,” he said, gently, “you are exciting yourself ; it is dangerous, you know. Do go up again, dear—do——”

She laughed.

“Do, dear,” she repeated, “and—leave *her*.”

As she pointed, Jenny shrank away in real terror.

“Look at her !” said she, advancing on her—“an artful, designing, false, deadly jade. I know her. I have heard about her. I have people that care about me, and tell me things. Come to my room, you poor deluded soul, and I will tell you things about *her*. Why, you don’t know that *she’s*——”

Jenny, visibly alarmed, turned to the Baronet.

“Oh ! Sir, this is dreadful — the poor lady ! Shall I ring ?”

“Shall she ring !” shrieked the sick woman. “Do you hear her ? Does she *dare* to give orders in *my* house ? Shall she ring for *her* servants—ha ! ha !—to drag the wretched, miserable Lady Maxwell up stairs ? Oh ! oh ! I have come to this !” And she burst into a flood of tears and hysterical sobs, under cover of which Jenny *did* ring the bell.

Jenny was trembling, though, like an aspen leaf ; she looked cowed and guilty. Suddenly the other began to shriek, ~~and~~ caught her side. It was a fit of spasms in fatal heart direction. It nearly brought her to the

ground. She was lifting herself in agony—striving upwards, as if to escape it. But women and men servants, some of whom had indeed been nearer than was supposed, came crowding in ; and the unfortunate lady, now helpless, was removed gently up stairs. Jenny followed, and passed to her own room. It was a painful and disagreeable scene, and had best be forgotten by all sides.

The eminent physician was sent for hurriedly—came—and said it was a bad business, and a miracle how she had survived it. It was the old story—a soothing and composing elixir ; and “we must be cautious, my dear Sir—a breath! you understand.” And, as usual, the physician illustrated his meaning by making himself into a temporary *Æolus* ; then passed through a painful pecuniary probation, and went his way.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN APPOINTMENT.

JENNY’S nerves were in a strange flutter. She had so trained herself to the pleasant swards of life, that any rough, stony places completely unhinged her. Every pulse was quivering. She was even a little terrified. But presently she got composed, and a feeling came uppermost of bitter anger at the outrageous language that had been applied to her.

“How dare she speak to me in that style!” said Jenny, pacing up and down. “How dare she vent her insolence on me! What does *she* know? And *he*—the

poor, cringing creature, that stood by and listened ! He's afraid of her—I am not, and never shall be ! ”

“ Let her take care ! ” continued Jenny, speaking aloud, “ I shan't be attacked in that way before the house. Disgraceful ! But if that man had the heart of a man, or was even like Welbore Craven, he would have sent her shrinking to her room with a look.”

Jenny was really in a little fury. Presently, however, came a gentler tone. She thought of that musical peal, Queen of Grey Forest. That Queen of Grey Forest kept chiming in her ear like the village bells of the place. Queen of Grey Forest—Lady Bountiful—possibly Lady Maxwell—for Jenny Bell. She began to walk with pride—seat in the church—carriage—companionship with the highest—for Jenny knew what she could do in that direction ;—and sweeter than all, to reign where her enemy, Charlotte, had reigned—the evicted pauper, who had once evicted her ! Was this not a strange retribution ?

But something stood between her and that vision, more tremendous miles than lay between London and Grey Forest itself.

Charlotte, the calm but resolute, she had a certain instinct, was busy ; and that woman, who had slandered her so vilely, might live for years to come. Jenny's lips curled acidly, and as usual, she stamped her foot.

She read no French novel that night, but went to bed, and lay awake in a flutter—a thing that had not occurred for years to her.

But next morning Jenny was the same again, and to her was restored her old sweetness. Not so with the barrister.

He came in with a conscious, shrinking look, as though he was ashamed to face his children seated round. His eyes dropped guiltily, as they fell on Jenny opposite. But her calm presence of mind survived all his awkwardness very handsomely. She was kind, gentle, and affable to her pupils. She just stole a look at the servant, whom, she fancied, bore a knowing air, as though he were behind the scenes. Sir Frederick hurried away down to his business.

Jenny was left to her duties. As she was going up stairs, she heard him call her to his study.

"You don't, of course," he said, awkwardly, "feel anything about that—that unpleasant scene of last night. You are too sensible; and she, poor woman, did not know what she was saying."

"Oh! no, Sir—dear, no," said Jenny, sadly; "but it is very distressing—most painful for me. I think—I think it must end—I cannot endure it."

"So it shall," said he, hurriedly, "so it shall. Only have patience—we are all more or less tried in this life. But if you have thought over," he added, meaningly, "what I said last night with favour, I can wait, and, cheerfully too."

He passed out, and left Jenny reflecting.

Two days after, the solicitor of Sir Frederick Maxwell, Bart., Q.C., had entered into the preliminaries for the purchase of Grey Forest. There were the usual *pourparlers*, but it was understood that the Baronet would not drive a very hard bargain. At the same time, a communication was made privately to the solicitor who had sent the deeds, that there was something a little suspicious about these documents.

As Jenny passed through the hall one morning, she glanced, as she always did, at the letter-box, and saw, sleeping within the bars of its cage, an imprisoned billet. It was always a pleasant amusement for her, this rifling of the letter-box, and she found entertainment in turning over and searching the physiognomies of all the despatches which arrived for the barrister. She swooped, as it were, on the new prize, and plundered the cage.

It was for her—a square, official-looking, rather club-looking envelope; and when Jenny came to study the seal, she read “United Conservative Club” upon it. Besides, there were two initials entangled together in the corner, like a pair of wrestlers, and these were “C. C.”

Jenny took it up to her room, with a fluttering heart. Here was something like progress; here, too, which was better still, was homage to those little powers of attraction which she possessed, and which she was humbly thankful that she possessed. Besides—shall it be confessed?—our Jenny began to look upon this youth with a sort of interest. She was a woman! and he began to strike her as bold and a little handsome, and she was pleased that he admired her—*her*—the lowly Jenny. He was of good rank, and as school life and law was monotonous, it filled in the hours agreeably. Yes, Jenny began to dwell upon the image of young Craven with something like pleasure. This was the letter:

“DEAR MISS BELL,—I have not seen you for a long time now. What are you doing? Where have you been? I wish to see you very much, not to tell you anything unpleasant, but to have a talk, one of our *old* talks. Do you recollect the smoking-room?” The

park is now my smoking-room, where I take my morning "weed," between ten and eleven. You may be shopping, or visiting, or anything, and I hope will have to cross it about the same time. Don't, of course, let me interfere with that ancient Sir Frederick Buzzard, who, if he requires your attendance, must have it.

"Yours,
"W. C."

Jenny read this document several times, and admired it much. She grew a little excited. "Ah! Miss Charlotte!" she said, and smiled. Jenny's future path did, indeed, seem smiling enough. Here were two matrimonial alleys leading—both dimly—to baronetcies. Who could tell?

Sir. Frederick Maxwell was gone to his court, and Jenny went to the study, sat herself down in his chair, drew it in, got out his pens, his ink, and paper—all which articles were on a scale of abundance and luxury, each the best of its kind, and over a soft handsome bed of red blotting paper, began to write.

Jealous, too, she thought, with a smile, as her eye fell on the allusion to "that ancient Sir Frederick Buzzard." She was in merry mood, things were going so smoothly and wrote merrily.

"DEAR MR. CRAVEN,—You have not seen me because I have been *very* busy, as indeed I *always* am. You know in what a genteel sort of slavery I live, though my master, 'that ancient Sir F. Buzzard,' as you call him so funnily, is not a tyrant. Can I understand you about the park and my walks? How did you find out that I would have to go to the Rev. Mr. Pole's female class at

that hour ? I am afraid you are very sly and too wise, or is it a sort of instinct ? Do I recollect the smoking-room ? Do I forget how *your* skill and calm sagacity *saved* us at a moment when *my* firmness, I confess, deserted me ? Do we ever forget, dear Mr. Craven, the happiest days of our lives ? No, as a certain poet remarked in a charming little poem—To Miriam, was it not ?—

“The brighter charms that bind us,
We never leave behind us.”

Those lines cling to my memory. Yes ; if I can escape my gaoler's vigilance, I suppose I must be in the new smoking-room to-morrow.

“Ever yours,
“JENNY.”

Jenny left a blank where the two lines occurred, and when she got up stairs, after some half an hour's rummaging among her little effects, she stumbled on the old newspaper cutting from the *Dorkingshire Conservative* ; and then, selecting two that seemed to suit the situation, copied them in accurately.

When she rose from the desk, and went to the door for this office, which she did a little suddenly, she heard a sound in the hall, and saw Master Jack skulking up the stairs. Of late a suspicion had once or twice flashed across Jenny that this odious urchin might be watching her—employed, perhaps, so to do. She called to him sharply.

“Come here, Sir.”

He answered, doggedly, “Mamma wants me.”

“I don't care,” said Jenny, her colour mounting. “I don't care who wants you. Come down here.”

He did so, slowly. And Jenny caught him by the ear—her favourite spot.

"Come in here, Sir," said Jenny, leading him by that delicate organ, and shutting the door.

"Now," she said, "have you learnt the six pages of grammar you got yesterday?"

"No."

"No! and why didn't you—eh?" said Jenny, sweetly.

"Mamma wanted me to stay with her."

"Take that," said Jenny, giving him a fine full slap, that embraced the whole side of his cheek. "So you won't learn your lessons, you odious, insolent, disobedient brat! You go up to your mamma now."

He gave her a scowl, and turned hastily to go.

"And look here," and Jenny's brow assumed a menacing look, "I warn you not to come spying on *me*. Mind, if you are caught again, I'll have the coachman in, to flog you while he can stand over you."

This threat did not seem to affright him, for he was staring doggedly at the blotting-paper on Jenny's desk.

"Go, Sir," said Jenny, giving him a push in the direction of the door. He disappeared, but slowly, and taking his own time.

Jenny was pleased with this encounter, and went back to her writing. She did not like the first draft—she thought it scarcely arch or *piquant* enough; so, she tore it across, and again across, and flung it into the basket under the table—the Barrister's dust pit. She wrote another, much more to her mind, got her bonnet, and took it herself to the penny post, just a street away.

As soon as the door was heard to slam, the urchin, Jack, his cheek still smarting, stole down to the study,

and began to pry and poke about as secretly as a mischievously inclined cub would do. He turned the blotting-book inside out—looked under the desk, and even into the waste-paper basket. He was heard not long after asking the housekeeper had she any gum? He got the gum, and he went up stairs to his mamma's room.

CHAPTER IX.

“THE SMOKING-ROOM.”

THE next day when the Barrister had gone down to court in his cab, Jenny tripped up stairs to her room, and descended shortly in her brightest and most brilliant walking dress. She had taste, had Jenny; and on this occasion she fringed her round, radiant face in a delicate horse-shoe bonnet, with deep crimson ribbons, which set her off prodigiously, and which was kept for special festivals. She also indulged herself in a pair of pale French gloves, and though her size was a little large for a lady's—a large “seven”—they fitted her exquisitely.

But as she was going down the steps, a cab drove up, and the face of Sir Frederick appeared at the window. He had forgotten a paper, or some notes, and had driven back post. He jumped out hastily. He was struck by Jenny's magnificence.

“Where are you going?” he said. “I can set you down anywhere.”

“Oh, no,” said Jenny, hastily. “I am going *that*

way," (pointing indistinctly in a direction that took in many quarters of the compass). "Thank you a *thousand* times. Dinner at half-past six to day." And she was moving away.

"Oh, I see," he said. "The Reverend Mr. Pole. That is so. Come, tell me, am I right?"

Jenny moved her head sweetly, with a motion that partook both of assent and negation, and again moved to go.

"But how far is Mr. Pole's? I can leave you there," he said.

"Oh, no," said Jenny, "I can walk."

"And how long will you stay?" said he.

"Oh, not long," said Jenny, with a gentle and resigned smile, as though Mr. Pole and his ladies were one of her trials; and then at last she got away.

She took a little detour and came into the park from the *other* side, and there upon a bench, under a tree, she saw young Craven, enjoying his new smoking-room—that is, she did not see him for a long time, but wandered about distractedly and helpless, until he—who had seen *her* long before—came good-naturedly to her aid.

"This is very kind of you—most kind," he said. "How shall I thank you?"

Jenny, who all through the interview maintained a frightened and suspicious manner, looking round, as though police might be seen on the horizon at any moment, answered him hurriedly.

"Not at all—not at all, Mr. Craven; but I dare not stay long."

"To be sure, to be sure," he answered. "And now, how have you been?—tell me all about yourself."

"Oh," said Jenny, sadly, "that would be a dull subject. The same monotonous round every day! What is to vary the course of *my* working life—unless, indeed——" And she lifted her eyes, with a sidelong glance at her companion, dropped them again, and coloured.

Our Jenny, it will be seen, was latterly getting bolder in her play, and risking more at each move.

But he passed by this charming opening, like a stupid country fellow, as he was.

I wonder did the word "bête," and the image it represents, rise in Jenny's brain. Nay, he seemed to be eager not to take it, for he went on with haste.

"Well," he said, "and what are you doing?—I mean your friend, the new Baronet—old Sir Frederick Buzzard, ha! ha!"

The painful struggle on Jenny's lips, between respect for her employer, and the rich sense of the ludicrous engendered by this happy conceit, was really amusing. But she gave way at last to uncontrollable laughter.

"Old Buzzard," said he, relishing his own wit. "And what is *he* doing? What will he *do* with his money? I hope he will leave you a handsome legacy, Miss Bell. But somebody told me he was buying an estate."

This was meant to be brought in with an easy *déagé* air, as a mere careless observation. It was clumsily done; but Jenny's mind was sailing away on another point. Though he laughed at "old Buzzard," you see, this was all a little secret jealousy.

"Yes," said Jenny, smiling, and busy with her glove, "he is talking of it. Indeed, he was good enough to consult me on the subject. And I suppose you have heard," said Jenny, "the poor Franklyns' dear, darling

Grey Forest is to be sold. They won't have an acre left—poor, poor children!”

“Yes,” said he, “I knew that. And do you mean to say that *he* is talking of buying it?”

“He says so,” said Jenny, looking down, and still on the jealousy point. “Someway, he has taken a fancy to it; having, I believe, some ridiculous, foolish idea, that I, being a friend of—the family,—would—would like it.”

Jenny brought this out with great hesitation, and meant it for a skilful move.

But he took his less hastily. “Exactly,” said he, eagerly. “And you put him off it? Of course you did. Quite properly. No; it wouldn't do. You thought of your old friends, and dissuaded him.”

“I!” said Jenny, looking at him with natural wonder.

“I tell you what,” said he, “it must not be. The truth is, we don't want it to be sold. I knew it. I said you would help us. If we could only just stave it off for a month or two.”

“We?” said Jenny, looking at him with a slight tinge of distrust.

“Yes,” said he, going on. “I don't mind letting you into our little secrets, though they *said* I wasn't. The truth is, we expect that old Cousin Hall will do something—matters are in train, you see. But all we want is a little delay—not to be pressed, you see—and then everything will come straight.”

Jenny's lip was curling. The little furnaces in her eyes were being kindled.

“I do see,” she said. “And I suppose it was for this you wished to see me to-day?”

“Well,” said he, awkwardly, “partly. Nothing like

candour, Miss Bell. I thought that if we could get your attractive influences on our side, everything would go well."

He bowed, to emphasise this clumsy compliment.

"Of course!" said Jenny, coldly—"of course! But why should you come to me? Why should I interfere? I think you know that the Franklyns have not treated me very well. Would it not be a little too generous?"

"Ah, but you *are* so generous—so high-minded—I *know* you would recollect nothing. So, indeed, I said to but she——"

He stopped.

"Go on!" said Jenny, with a scoff; "let us hear it all. What did *she* say? Then, I presume, the old attachment goes on? Ah, Mr. Craven, Mr. Craven," added she, suddenly assuming her old manner, "how sly—how dreadfully sly of you; and not to tell me, your old friend, poor little Jenny."

She had twanged the string of his self-sufficiency, and he smiled. "Why," said he, "you are wonderful at guessing. Poor Charlotte, she has made a noble, valiant battle of it. I never saw such a girl. She has fought through it all—alone."

"Indeed," said Jenny, with great interest; "and I suppose Sir Welbore, like a true, honourable man, will not stand in the way."

"Why, you see," said he, with importance, "there is a little mystery here. There are mysteries on all sides of us."

"So it appears," said Jenny. "And I suppose this has been going on all the while—privately?"

"Well," said he, with great complacency, "I may

say, it has. To see a brave, noble girl, to whom I had plighted my troth"—he gave out these words with great satisfaction—"to whom I was bound by all the laws of honour and morality—to see her struggling on nobly, without a sigh or a complaint, and cheerfully resigning——"

"The brilliant prospect that was before her! Of course, I understand," said Jenny.

He did not perceive the manner in which this was said.

"But I don't mind saying to you that obstacles are passing away. In a short time—a very short time—we expect my father will come round—in fact, *is* coming round. But, Mum, you understand?"

"Perfectly!" said Jenny.

"Everything will go smooth," he said, warming. "And I may say I have had a good share in it. I know a thing or two."

Jenny laughed a little harshly. "You are very wise, Mr. Craven; I always said so. But, in a serious step of this sort, one should look carefully on all sides. Even the wisest of men, like *young* Mr. Craven, may not see something."

He did not like the tone of Jenny's voice.

"Oh! I have provided for everything, Miss Bell."

"Of course anything *I* may say will be regarded with a natural suspicion—from the peculiar relation. I make no secret of it—I have no strong affection for Miss Franklyn, nor she for me; but, as a sort of friend I tell you, I think you should look well into the matter before taking any serious step."

There was such an unco concealed sneer in Jenny's voice,

that he was nettled, and answered with an attempt at a sneer also.

"This seems a little wicked, Miss Bell," he said, in a wounded tone. "I am afraid I can guess the motives that are at work."

Jenny laughed again.

"Accept my congratulation," she said; "you are making a *brilliant* match, in every light you can look at it."

He coloured. "These little remarks have no effect on me."

"Of course not. You have the satisfaction of doing what is right. Yet," said Jenny, suddenly changing her voice into a key of great tenderness, "we were once great friends. You used to advise me to let me consult you in my little difficulties. Our acquaintance has furnished me with some delightful memories, which in my lonely hours;—but no matter. I must speak—it is only fair to warn you, Sir Frederick Maxwell has heard strange rumours about your friends—something about deeds of trust have turned up, and which are suspected not to be all right. I can say no more. Good-bye."

He was confounded.

"Stay—stay," said he, "tell me more. I want to know——"

"I dare not," said Jenny, sweetly. "I cannot—I am bound up. Good-bye. There may be nothing in the rumour. But, still it is right you should know it. Curious, they should not have told you!"

She left him looking after her and wondering—speculating, in his mind, what she could have alluded to. He then went his way slowly. p

Jenny went home in a curious frame of mind. Latterly things were going not quite so smoothly as she was accustomed to make them go; and she even felt a presentiment that the might be worse yet. She seemed to be losing the spring and spirit of victory which had been carrying her forward. "She is plotting," said Jenny, to herself, walking very fast. "I am *sure* she is plotting in secret against me. The smooth, cunning piece of virtue," said she, with disgust, "with her quiet air of suffering. And that—*fool*, to be caught by her!" Jenny was posting along at a fierce rate. "But I shall beat her yet. She shall be no match for me. She shall *never* get back to Grey Forest, if I die for it."

The mention of that sweet name had a soothing effect on Jenny. "Queen of Grey Forest," and "Lady Maxwell," again began to chime in her ears. Never were there such musical bells. Still she had the sense of a presentiment hanging over her; and compressing her lip, she entered the house, determined not to be too leisurely, and to hurry on matters.

CHAPTER X.

JENNY WORKS.

BUT, alas for our Jenny! that fatal assignation in the park was destined to accumulate very many heavy stumbling-blocks in her road, more than her poor weak shoulders could get out of the way. The Barrister, when Jenny was gone about two minutes, recollected something he wished to ask her, and seizing his hat, ran out after her. He followed down to Piccadilly, and saw her crossing to the park. This was not the road to Mr. Pole's chapel. So he stopped suddenly, and an idea occurring to him, followed slowly, and at a distance. He was a lawyer; and what to other men was an inequality in the sand, was to him a footprint.

He saw it all—nay, heard some of it; saw Jenny return;—saw the whole, with the anger of a vain, weak man, discovering that he has been duped. Poor Jenny! It is to be feared that half-hour's work has placed the charming castle of Grey Forest upon a magic carpet, and transported it through the air into another quarter of the globe. She does not know it or suspect it.

She will have hard labour to set things straight, for he was an odd man; and once touched in his vanity, never forgave or forgot.

Scarcely in the best of humours, Jenny went to her room, and cast aside her decorations. She sat by her fire, and cast up her accounts—her moral accounts. In ten minutes she had mapped out a scheme. She must strive and act speedily and with decision.

She was thinking of her friend, Sir Welbore Craven, Baronet; and how jealous and strict he was about family honour. She was thinking a little pettishly of the perverse turn things seemed to be taking latterly. However, as she before thought, precious time was being frittered away. She dawdled rather too much. If she but had an Archimedean spot to stand on—a secure vantage-ground of fixed station and commanding elevation—not the slippery footing of a mere governess, she would move the earth.

At dinner, strange to say, the Barrister was moody and out of humour. He scarcely spoke to Jenny—a thing she had never known before; and Jenny detected his eyes roaming to her secretly, with a glowering, moody expression. At times he would by an effort shake this off, and put a sort of constraint upon himself, making an effort at being good-humoured; but presently the original moodiness returned.

“Some of these court creatures,” thought Jenny, “had treated him roughly. He had broken down in a case. But why should he vent it on me?” thought Jenny. Why, indeed? Why vent it on that gentle imploring face, who now so piteously deprecated his wrath? She did all she could; but he was an odd man, and had odd ways.

That evening, as Jenny was thinking of going down to the study as usual, she heard a step on the stairs, and looking over the banister cautiously, saw young Jack descending very softly. This was an offence against school-room laws; but Jenny wondered what he was going down with such secrecy for; and then she heard him tap at the study door, and go in. It was altogether

a proceeding of complete indifference, yet she did not like it. This wretched cub she detested. He stayed there a full quarter of an hour. Jenny would have given a good deal to have been invisibly present; or indeed, to have been merely separated by the ordinary partition of door or wall. In default of better modes of hearing, such would have been welcome; but it was dangerous and impracticable.

Fully a quarter of an hour was the cub closeted with his father.

Jenny then thought she heard a noise, and began to move up stairs again. But at the sick woman's door a wan face was peering out, and part of a long, shrunk figure. To Jacky it said, "Come here; tell me what he said."

Jenny had begun to look on this woman as her enemy. She felt within her a curious dislike, which was strengthening every day. Someway she had a notion that this weak dying woman was dangerous, more or less dangerous. Jenny did not care to conceal herself, but boldly confronted her.

"Oh! it is you," said the withered lips. Jenny thought how like a ghastly hag or witch her figure looked. "Oh! *Miss Bell*, I am very well, you see!"

"I am glad to hear it, Madam," said Jenny, looking at her, coldly, and conveying how repulsive was the figure she saw.

"No, you are not," said the other, quickly; "no, you are not. Don't give yourself the trouble of telling what is not true to me. But I am *very* well—I am getting better every day. The doctors say so. Now!"

"I don't want to dispute with you," said Jenny, in the

same hard tone. "I have no object in setting you right."

"Haven't you!" said the other, as usual getting excited. "No, of course not. No, you haven't. You feel quite secure, no doubt! Ah! but take care, my fine lady. You don't know everything—you don't know all that may be going on, wise as you be. Ah! there's my Jacky coming. Come in, come in, Jacky, and tell mamma all about it. You and I, Jacky dear, weak as we are, will be a match for her yet."

The cub gave Jenny a look of defiance, thinking, no doubt, of the slaps on his cheek, and the door shut them in.

Jenny trembled with rage and fury, to be bearded by these two miserable creatures, whom she despised.

Worse than all, she feared they might indeed be plotting to bring ruin on such an innocent head as hers. Such creatures often had a secret strength. She trembled. But she did not fear them. But towards the miserable lady, who could be so insolent to her, she felt a feeling of something like hate, that intensified every moment.

She went down hurriedly to the study. The Barrister looked at her steadily as she entered, then cast down his eyes upon his books a moment, then spoke to her with all the old cheerfulness. The clouds had passed away. He was himself again. What tricks does imagination play us, thought Jenny, wisely. She had conjured up a whole nightmare of plots and conjurations.

Never was she so winning—so gentle—so seductive! It would have been hard for mortal to resist her. She was soft and engaging—melancholy and pensive, and

someway conveyed, by mysterious process, that this tone of mind was associated with a deep, passionate, but, alas ! unrequited attachment. She was only a poor governess ; the green places of life were not for her. So she must only suffer in silence, and without complaint, though her heart might break.

The Baronet listened, and in his own way tried some comfort—still scarcely received it with the raptures that might reasonably have been expected from one of his weak character. But he was an odd man—a very odd man ;—a vain man, too.

Jenny found a letter in the letter-box that night. It was from the Rev. Mr. Wells, whom she had quite forgotten. It was in a wounded, broken tone. He must leave, he said, to-morrow. His rector was deeply offended and he must hurry back. He had waited from day to day, in the hope of hearing from her. He had thought he was an old friend—one of the few that she honoured with some little degree of liking. But no matter now ! He was going away. Perhaps it had been better if he had never come. But no matter now. He had called repeatedly, but could never get in. The unhappy curate had indeed called many times. The fact was, Jenny was getting sadly bored with his obscure hints of a deep passion, and his more open rhapsodies. She had, in truth, a supreme contempt for him and his nature. She never liked these whining men, as she called them.

She went on with his letter. He had made it his business, he said, to inquire after their common friends, in whom he heard she was so interested. He had met Mr. Craven that evening, who had told him there was good news for the Franklyns—some very good news—

something, as he (the curate) gathered it, about money. But young Craven would not say anything more explicit. "Perhaps," added the curate, "our dear children may be back in old Grey Forest again, and we may all meet there as of old. I am very wretched and low-spirited. May I call to-morrow, to bid you good-bye?"

Back in Grey Forest, thought Jenny. Never. And she turned hastily round, and entered the study again, where was Sir Frederick, still with his briefs.

She came back to look for something. She could not find it. The Barrister watched her movements. Then she asked him carelessly when dear, dear Grey Forest was to be bought—"by-the-way," she introduced it.

He said he could not tell. There were difficulties. "I am not so enthusiastic about that purchase as I was," he added.

"What! give it up?" said Jenny, clasping her hands. "Oh! Sir, if you were to know how I have been feasting on the idea. Only the other night I had such a sweet, delicious dream. I thought I was wandering in its gardens."

"I am sorry," said he, gravely—"very sorry. But, however, it is not given up as yet."

"But, I thought," said Jenny, with a deep sigh—"I thought it was something like a promise. I thought you had so kindly intended—But no matter; I am used," she added, with a gentle smile, "to these little disappointments. It will be all the same in a hundred, perhaps in a dozen years."

She said this in so plaintive and touching a manner—in a tone so exquisitely mournful, that the Barrister raised his head, and said softly—

"Oh, Jenny ! I don't know what to think. If I only knew—if I could trust you—anybody ;—but no matter. We will see about it. There. Good-night."

Jenny tripped away with a light step. "It is done !" she said, exulting. But no time was to be lost. Her confidence in her own powers was restored. "After all," she said, smiling, "who can help Jenny like Jenny ? All their castles would soon be tumbling about their ears."

At once she sat down and wrote a note to the curate—a gentle, tender note. Could he put off his sad journey for one day ? She wished to see him—to consult him—to have *his* advice. Don't let her, however, interfere with his plans—no, not for the world. Even he, she was grieved to see, did not understand her. No one, indeed, *properly* understood her ; but she had thought that *he*, from their old friendship ;—it was not much matter. There were many things one was obliged to do, which, if the true secret were known ;—but no matter about that, too. Action, action, thought Jenny, as she lay down to rest.

CHAPTER XI.

AN EMBASSY.

HE came the next day. He, too, strange to say, was moody and injured. He was very sorry—he must go; delighted to help her any way, but could not stay longer.

Jenny heard him calmly. She had no notion of having to take trouble with so contemptible an instrument as this, and her first impulse was to dismiss him at once; but she wanted him.

“Go, then,” she said, with her old, sad manner. “Of course, you must go. Your interests, indeed, I should be sorry to stand in the way of. Some one else will help me. Thank you a thousand times for *all* your goodness. Good-bye, dear Mr. Wells; think of me sometimes.”

He was taken back by this ready acceptance of his declaration. He coloured, he stammered.

“Could I do nothing for you, dear Miss Bell?” he said, hesitatingly.

“Nothing,” said Jenny, with a smile—“nothing that I would ask you to do. I shall find some one to help me; in fact, I *have* found.”

He grew disquieted.

“I am sure,” he said, “if I thought—that is——”

“Do you think,” said Jenny, earnestly, “I would put a kind friend’s sympathy to such a test? Never! Good-bye, dearest Mr. Wells.”

He was very much troubled.

"What *can* I do?" he said, distractedly. "I would give anything—I would give the world to show what I feel. Tell me what you——"

"No!" said Jenny, firmly; "I have considered. Perhaps you have been too kind to me to let you run any risk for me. Perhaps—but no matter. We will think of it no more."

"This is cruel—this is unkind," he said, bitterly; "you won't trust me, I see. There is some one else. I knew it. The old story."

"Ah," said she, "if you only *did* know."

"I will stay," he said, desperately. "I will write to him to-night. He could not grudge me a few days. No, ~~he~~ is not such a tyrant!" he added, excitedly.

"Impossible," said Jenny; "it is too painful a duty—more fitted for *his* hands."

"Whose hands?" said the other, quickly.

"Ah!" said Jenny, "*you* would never go to Sir Welbore Craven. He will be in town to-morrow. See him at his club; speak with him—tell him——"

"Is that all?" said the curate. "I know him very well. To be sure——"

"It is a dreadful duty, but *must* be done. How shall I speak it? You will prejudge me, of course. You must warn him against this marriage. Ah, pity me, pity me, dear Mr. Wells!" she added, sinking into a chair.

"Against Charlotte's marriage! Good gracious! Why? wherefore?" he said, bewildered.

"Pity me! pity me!" continued Jenny, rocking herself. "My friend, my childhood's friend! But," she said, starting up, "I *dare* not let it pass. It would

haunt me to my grav *Forgery!* A good man to have his house dishonoured ! No, no !”

“*Forgery! dishonoured!*” he repeated, mechanically.

“We have the papers in the house, sent to Sir Frederick. There could be no concealment,” said she, speaking in a very hurried manner. “Conscience! conscience! Mr. Wells. And that it should have come upon *me*—their childhood’s friend! Is it not a terrible trial?”

“Oh, oh, Miss Bell!” he said, reproachfully, “from you—*her* friend. You must get some one else. I cannot indeed.”

“So I said,” said Jenny, scornfully; “and so I told you. It is to be done, nevertheless. We have consciences—some of us, at least. *You* don’t understand me, Mr. Wells; I did not expect you would, and there are few who do. You jump at the harshest construction. Naturally. No matter, I must write now. I have many letters to get through.”

“And you want me to betray, to denounce my old friends—my kind good friends? Why, I heard Sir Welbore was relenting. Ah, don’t, don’t,” he added, piteously—“don’t make me do this, please don’t.”

“*Make* you do it,” said Jenny, with flashing eye. “Who talks of making you? You are incurable, I see. Take your own view of this, and leave me, Sir, I beg.”

“Oh, Miss Bell!” said he, with a groan.

“Do you suppose it is a pleasant task for *me*?” said she, turning sharply on him. “Of course *I* feel nothing!”

But he shook his head sadly, and took up his hat in silence. Jenny watched him anxiously.

"You are right," she said, at last. "Go down to your parish again. Self is the first instinct. Do not forget, however," she said, "that it was *you* who betrayed me into this confidence. I confess I thought—but no matter. Good-bye."

There was a strange expression of anguish in his face. "I dare not," he said. "Those poor orphans—I could not bring myself to it." And then, opening the door slowly, he stood looking back wistfully. Jenny never looked at him. Finally he passed out.

Jenny stamped her foot impatiently, and let her hand and arm fall upon the table.

"Fool!" she said; "weak, empty fool! How could I have wasted time on such a creature! Ah, this is the way they all fail me! The trouble I have had with this crawling curate! But no matter. I shall find better instruments."

The door was opened softly, and he appeared again, laid down his hat, and said, mournfully, "I will do *whatever* you want."

"Ha," thought Jenny, "every obstacle gives way—Queen of Grey Forest before a month."

The miserable curate slunk about the approaches to Sir Welbore's club the whole of the next day, but could not see him. Two days after he did meet him, and in a guilty way imparted to him what he had heard, first binding him to solemn secrecy as to the channel through which it reached him.

The Baronet went nigh to fainting in the street. It was as though some one said, "The person you have

been sitting next in the railway first class carriage for the last six hours is just out of a plague hospital." He shrunk away, and had to get wine at his club.

There was a frightful scene at his home that evening. The Baronet, Sir Welbore, had indeed showed signs of yielding. A stout, tall, hale elderly gentleman, who had lived at Dieppe, had waited on him, and made some offers that really made him gasp. The words that fell from the tall, hale, elderly gentleman seemed like a stream of gold pieces falling down and clinking on each other. The Baronet told the gentleman he did him a great deal of—er—honour, and he should be glad—er—to hear again—er—er—from him.

These melodious offers quite drowned the unpleasant sound of the word "suicide," but it could not drown the louder and uglier cry of FORGERY. Jenny's fate was dancing up and down in the scales.

CHAPTER XII.

THE EMISSARY AND HIS MISSION.

THAT evening came the curate to wait on his mistress, to recount his mission. Jenny met him eagerly on the stairs, and found him very downcast. "Well," she said, impatiently. "Oh, come in here," and she brought him into the study.

He told his story in an excited sort of way. He had met young Craven not long after, and tried to avoid him. But he then caught hold of him.

"They have told my father," he said. "I know

whence that move came.' And then," said the curate, "he became outrageously insolent in his language about——"

"About poor me," said Jenny. "Of course, I expect it. Ever since I was a child it has been the same," added she, mournfully. "Nothing but harsh cruel words from all sides. Even my friends——friends whom I love——even they," said Jenny, looking musingly at Mr. Wells, "fall naturally into the same strain."

Much excited, the curate made a motion to catch her hand, and protested earnestly that she did him wrong—that he would fly to the ends of the earth to help her. "Why," he added, ruefully, "am I here? Am I not running a dreadful risk by staying? As it is, I have nearly undone myself; but——"

"And what did he say," said Jenny, coming back to business, "this kind friend?"

"He talked of a plot," answered the curate, "and a conspiracy; said he would baffle it; and then he *dared* to speak about some one being vindictive, malicious, and——"

"Go on," said Jenny, smiling; "I can bear it all."

"But I stopped him quickly," added the other, with fresh excitement. "I told him I would not listen to him, that it was cowardly——mean——to speak so of an unprotected girl."

"Unprotected," said Jenny, holding out her hand with enthusiasm. "No, no! not while I have such hearts that can love me as I *know* I have."

"So I told him," said the curate; "and that you and that I, and every one, scorned his vile slanders."

"Noble, brave, generous!" murmured she.

"I could have struck him," said the excited curate, now hurrying on in a torrent of words. "I could have——"

"No, no; no," said Jenny. "It were best to bear these things in charity. And what did he tell you about the Franklyns?"

"Yes," said the other. "They are doing well, he said. Oh! I recollect—Grey Forest is not to be sold. It is finally settled."

"Not to be sold?" said Jenny, hastily.

"No; it has been saved. A friend or relative has come forward—a cousin living in France. All the incumbrances are to be paid off; and as soon as Charlotte is well, they are all to go back."

Jenny's eyes lighted up with rage. Here was her kingdom of Grey Forest—the Spanish Castle—all destroyed in a second.

"She is ill, is she?" said Jenny. "I didn't know *that*. So they go back to Grey Forest, do they? Perhaps you have more good news still," added Jenny, sarcastically.

"Yes, I think he said something else," said he dreamily; "something about these deeds—these so-called forgeries!"

"So-called," said Jenny, with a sneer.

"That was his expression," said the curate. "He asked where they were. He said they must get them up. I told him Sir Frederick had them."

"What made you do that?" said Jenny, with sudden fierceness. "It was a pity—I mean," she added, changing her tone, "a misfortune."

In short, he left Jenny with this good news in a sadly disturbed state of mind. He went away himself in a stranger state of distraction. He thought he had never seen Jenny looking so dazzling. But he felt he ought to leave this fatal London in the morning, and he half determined on a desperate extrication—to fling himself suddenly into the train, and be borne away from this seductive Circe.

Jenny, however, actually lay awake for a couple of hours. She was really disturbed. Her cruel enemy was gradually drawing to the front. But before she dropped off to sleep something occurred to her. “Ah,” said she, raising herself on the pillow, “*that* will do it.”

CHAPTER XIII.

A MISSION.

EARLY in the morning, before breakfast, she had tripped away to the obscure lodgings where the curate dwelt. It was a long way, and she had some difficulty in finding it. She found him sitting in a chair, with his face buried in his hands. He rushed forward to meet her.

“Oh ! oh ! Miss Bell,” he said, in a broken voice, “I am ruined—ruined for ever.”

“Ruined !” said Jenny.

“They have dismissed me. I have lost my curacy. And oh ! Jenny,” he said, sadly, “this is your doing.”

Jenny gave him a reproachful look, as much as to say, “This from you.”

"Then," said Jenny, with a noble and heroic burst : "there, now, you belong to your friends. *They* must watch over you. Those who have long loved you—secretly, but long—it will be their duty to comfort, to console, to watch over. Yes, dearest Mr. Wells, away with all delicacy—we can speak out now."

The curate sprang to his feet with rapture.

"Are you serious?" he said. "No, no, you are deceiving me. It is too blessed news to be true."

"Can you not have guessed?" said Jenny, with a smile. "Oh! dull, incredulous men! You make us poor women, with blushing and confusion, tell out our most darling secrets."

"Divine girl!" murmured the curate, looking at her in rapture. "What are their wretched offices after this! I despise them! Oh! Jenny, Jenny, you have changed despair into joy! But tell me—you *must* tell me——"

"Hush, hush," said Jenny, looking round, and speaking very fast. "We will talk of this again in a few days. But now I am going to put your devotion to the test—to such a test!"

"Name it!—anything! Say you wish me to sail for China—America—anywhere!"

"No, not so far as China; but a long way."

"Ah! Jenny," said he, "I am so glad—I would travel whole continents for you."

Jenny gave him her hand—that round, plump, little hand—perhaps as a stimulant or cordial. He took it, exactly as a thirsty man would a stimulant or cordial.

"Strange things have taken place," said Jenny, still

speaking very fast. "Strange, mysterious complications have come about. There is danger menacing me. I have secret enemies!" said Jenny, excitedly.

"Secret enemies," said he. "No—such goodness, such sweetness—impossible."

"It is so," said Jenny, sadly. "They are plotting all about me to ruin me. I have no one to aid me — no one to look to, except——"

She gave him a look of angelic sweetness. Again he seized her hand.

"But if they plot, we *must* counterplot. We must scheme in self-defence. She I have discovered—Charlotte—would destroy me!"

He was amazed.

"Oh! no," he said, doubtfully—"impossible. She seemed so good, so amiable."

"Ah! she always pleased you. But *I* know. *Recollect, she once ruined me, and she will do so again if she can!*"

This seemed to make an impression on the curate. There was a long pause.

"Where do you wish me to go for you?" he asked.

"A long journey," said Jenny, sadly. "Across to France, then down all France, to Avignon."

"Is that all?" he said. "Why, I could be there to-morrow night. What am I to do? When am I to go?"

"There is a small packet—very precious, and of the greatest importance—which we are going to intrust to you. There is a family called Hall living there. You must find them out, give them the packet, and open it before them. I shall give you a letter, which you shall open

when you get to Avignon ; and you will promise me to carry out all the instructions contained in it."

"But——" said the curate, hesitatingly.

"When you return," said Jenny, with a bright beam in face, "*then* we shall talk of what is near to both our hearts. After toil, pleasure. You shall tell me your story, and, perhaps—I shall tell you mine."

"Angel!" murmured the curate, and finally, for the last time, kissed her hand.

Jenny returned triumphant for the moment, yet presently began to despond. It had been a terrible blow. The crown of Grey Forest was gone from her! No matter. *She* should not wear it, if the heavens and earth were to be moved. What about this Cousin Hall?

When she came in, she made breakfast. The Barrister, and his son, when the bell rang, came in from the study together. Jenny looked at them suspiciously. The cub looked at her with his usual insolence, but the clouds had passed away from the Baronet's brow. He was himself again. Jenny raised her eyes to heaven in unspeakable thankfulness. She laid out, how later on, she would gently and sweetly remonstrate with, and have a formal reconciliation with all the flourishes and accompaniments.

But Sir Frederick told her how he was obliged to go away for a day or two, a little suddenly—a case down at Liverpool. He would be up again shortly. He said good-bye to her, warmly, and Jenny got up a little bit of mournful demeanour expressly for the occasion. He went away about twelve o'clock.

Events now began to crowd themselves. These were, perhaps, some of the most exciting days in Jenny's life.

She was fluttering about the house in a fever of agitation. His departure was the most strangely opportune thing. When his cab had driven away, she waited a quarter of an hour or so, then went down softly to the study, ran to the tin case which contained the Franklyn deeds, chose out the suspicious instrument, and saw that there could be no mistake; then began to pack it up carefully.

She sealed it, and tied it round with cord; then wrote a letter on Sir Frederick's stationery, and sealed that. Then she went to her room.

It was, indeed, an exciting day for her, and her cheek glowed.

Then, about four o'clock, she got her bonnet and went down stairs to go out. Out of the study came the cub, Jack, and met her.

He put a pencilled note into her hand.

"Papa wrote this at the railway," he said, "and said particularly you were to give what he mentions there to me."

There was a dogged look about the boy which Jenny did not like, and she thought of taking her accustomed enjoyment on his cheek, but her mind was too full of more important things. The pencilled scrap was as follows :—

"L. & N. W. Railway.

"DEAR MISS BELL, — I want the Franklyn deed I spoke to you about the other night. I stupidly forgot it, and it is of the last importance. Give it to Jack, and he will send it by next train. It is marked 'A.D.' You are the only one who knows its appearance.

"F. M."

The cub had such a look of insolent meaning that Jenny again thought of her favourite punishment, but she forbore.

"I know nothing about it," she said. "How can I find deeds? I shall write to him."

"But you were to give it to me," said the boy. "And you do know where it is, Miss Bell. You know you were searching there just now."

Jenny instantly grasped the packet she had tied up so carefully. The boy's eyes were upon it.

"It is false, you wretched little imp!" said Jenny, in a fury. "And, let me tell you, if you go spying on me, I'll——"

"Give it to me," said the boy, "they will all know you have it; it's a shame."

Jenny's palm descended fiercely. The stroke resounded loudly. Some one had been listening over the stairs, for there came a shriek, "Let the child alone. How dare you, woman, lay hands on my boy!" And my boy, crying, ran up stairs, threatening Jenny fiercely, and giving her at parting such a look of rage and vindictiveness.

Jenny was terribly excited. She was chafed and harassed; but ever ready to do battle with all the world. She had a wonderful spirit, that rose in the struggle.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SUDDEN PURPOSE.

At the lodgings of the Franklyn family there **was** indeed a change. Hope had some way made its way in, and there were now cheerful faces to be seen. But Charlotte was still ill and depressed, and lay on a sofa in the drawing-room, doing battle with her malady, and affecting a light heart and light spirits, for the sake of those all round her.

'The cousin who had lived all his life abroad, had indeed stepped on the scene like a good male fairy. Cousin Croesus he should have been called, but that he had not any of the flash and spangles which usually attend the entrance of such beings. He was a plain, hale, tall, blunt old gentleman, who seemed to be always associated with his stick, which he leant on and brandished, and struck emphatically on the ground. This is all the outline needed for so useful, yet, as to mere detail, so unimportant a character.

The evening of the day on which we last saw Jenny, the family were together in this way. They were in a few days to leave their mean lodgings, and in a few weeks were to be down at Grey Forest, back again at the old place. Cousin John Hall had brought in *his* man of business, a skilful head and a delicate hand, who was disentangling their affairs slowly but surely. They were turning out to be not nearly in so distracted a state as was supposed; but above all, at the potent

spell of some bags of gold, the twisted cords began of themselves to get free.

This evening then, at about four o'clock, came in young Craven, to see after Charlotte. For one, of his temper, he had behaved with marvellous constancy all through. To-night he entered with a troubled air. Charlotte noticed it at once.

"You may go, dears," she said to her sisters; "I want to speak to Mr. Craven for a moment."

Although she had been firm in dealing with their engagement as broken off, she did not indeed order the door to be kept rigorously barred in his face, as some sterner and colder virgins might have done; but he knew her character well, and that there was a barrier between them as impenetrable as any iron bar known. Now, however, the clouds were breaking, and there was hope.

"You have something to tell me," she said. "More bad news? I am always prepared."

With much hesitation young Craven owned that it was so; and then, with a wonderful delicacy for one of his nature, told her of the ugly story he had heard, relative to her father.

Charlotte rose up excitedly.

"It is false!" she said, "I know it is false; some vile invention of our enemies."

"I don't know," said he, gloomily, "I trust so. But, dear Charlotte, it seems a little probable, and the person that told my father——"

"Who? Who?" said Charlotte.

"Your old friend," he said, "who could have no interest—Wells, the curate."

"Ah!" said Charlotte, "do you not see it *now*? Her finger—she has been at work. I know it; that wretched man is enslaved to her. She has set him on this vile calumny."

Charlotte was growing very excited. He tried to calm her. She even got up and began to walk up and down.

"You must find him out. Help me to find him out—wring a confession out of him. He is a weak, good-natured creature, but powerless in *her* hands. Not a moment must be lost. If ever," she said imploringly, "you would wish to do me a kindness, help me now."

Young Craven was in his element. He liked to be of importance, and rushed away. The girls, to their astonishment, found Charlotte very pale and walking about.

Young Craven hurried away. It was now past five o'clock, and he went to seek him at his lodgings. He did not find him there. He came back again later, and was told that the Rev. Mr. Wells had left town.

But Charlotte continued her nervous and excited walk up and down her room. Though she had repudiated it so scornfully to Mr. Craven, she had a terrible instinct that there was truth somewhere. That weight of anxiety that always hung over her father, seemed something more than the mere burden of pecuniary embarrassment. It always seemed like the nervous dread of coming disclosure. Indeed she knew, as well as if she had seen the fatal parchment, that something of the kind had been done. She never gave way until this moment. The old, honourable house, and her dear father's name, to be sullied by this foul charge.

Everything else she had borne ; want, grief, and general misery ; but this terrible phantom of disgrace fluttering and flapping over their heads, was more than she could endure. She would give worlds to have gone forth in some direction, and have taken action in some sense ; but, unhappily, she knew no special direction in which to move. It was all a wilderness round her. But no answer came to her from young Mr. Craven. Just after six o'clock, when the lamp was being brought in, a letter, in a strange hand, was given to Charlotte. A young boy had left it, and there was no answer. She opened it and read :—

“ Sir Frederick Maxwell sent back to-day for one of your family deeds ; but *she* said it could not be found. She afterwards packed it in a yellow sheet of paper, and gave it to Mr. Wells, the curate. He is going away with it to-night, to Avignon, in France, where he is to show it to some people called Long.

“ Yours,

“ A SECRET FRIEND.”

It was written in trembling, shaking characters, like the hand of a sick lady.

Now she saw it all, and the direction she was praying for became suddenly revealed. The knowledge of whose handiwork was here discovered, gave her sudden strength. She kindled with anger and defiance. She now knew it was a base, vile plot. She felt a sudden strength imparted to her weak frame.

She had her whole plan mapped out in a few seconds. Action — quick, firm, and determined — was necessary.

Everything depended on destroying this rumour and its evidences before it had time to spread.

It was now past seven o'clock. She called in her sisters. There was no use entering into elaborate explanations with them—and they were not too curious.

Something had happened—nothing to alarm them—which rendered it necessary for her to go away for a short time only.

“Go away!” they said in astonishment. “Where—when—for how long?”

“There!” said Charlotte, with a smile, “I knew you would be frightened. What is there in a little trip into the country for two or three days?”

“But you are so ill!” both said together, “so weak—so delicate.”

“It will do me good,” said Charlotte, still smiling. (She was obliged to sink on the sofa at that moment.)

“Change of air! Why, it is the very thing!”

“But where *are* you going, dear Charlotte?” they said again. “Tell us. Oh! it is very wrong of you. You are not fit. You——”

“Hush! hush!” said Charlotte, “only a day or two. I will write every day. Now help me to get my things together. Stay, dears, one moment. *Not a word to any one of my being away.* You know not how much depends on this. Promise me.”

They did promise with wonder and a sense of mystery. In twenty minutes she was ready—in five more she was in a cab, speeding away to London Bridge.

CHAPTER XV.

A JOURNEY.

AT London Bridge were many gathered, converging from many quarters of London; a stream, a turgid, swollen stream of brawling men and women, barrows of luggage, trundling porters, children, cloaks, capes, umbrellas in bundles, like faggots—all pouring in through the entrance, as through a burst sluice. There were Paris men hurrying back to Paris, and London men hurrying from London; for India, military men, now at their very last day's leave, and who have to count the seconds to save distance; brides and bridegrooms, tourists, fathers of families, with all their household regiments, and the baggage and ammunition of their household regiments—in short, the whole motley, polyglot, parti-coloured cosmopolitan assemblage—the true citizens of the world, who are to be encountered every night at that wonderful station.

Yet the weakest and most fragile of all was the veiled lady, in mourning, who was scarcely able to totter from her cab, and had but three minutes to spare to save the train.

Ill and weak as she was, she took a hasty glance down the long series of well-lighted blue cabins which, with doors open, stretched down the platform. They were all full, rank after rank, row after row, of tenants—some reading, some patient, and in attitude of expectancy—all duly draped, and made taut, compact and comfortable. There was a ten hours' night before them—a

night of swooping through many counties, leaving a trail of sparks behind, like a locomotive comet. Still, swiftly as she was hurried down the platform by a bearded conductor, who affected a foreign air, she was able to mark a face she knew peering from a blue cabin, number 90. The oil lamp above sent down a dull yellow glare upon him, and revealed the Reverend Charlton Wells. But the Reverend Charlton Wells knew not who was the veiled lady in mourning that looked in so curiously, down through the night.

The Paris express went on its way. The series of bright blue chambers swooped down towards the sea, like a swift bird. The land cabin passengers sat within, muffled, and read, and talked, and nodded drowsily. A clergyman, in number 90, with a little hand-bag on his knee, did not—he was too excited. He was laying out pictures of his future life—of a nuptial crown, blessings, favours, and exquisite bliss. He chafed against the delay, and thought the great bird upon whose back he was borne moved its wings too slowly. In a blue chamber lower down, the muffled lady carried on a stronger contest, but a victorious struggle, over weakness, sickness, and an unutterable anxiety—yet, over all three, by the force of will, she triumphed. This she was determined would carry her through. A soothing comfort happily came to her aid: the unfamiliar motion—the exertion she had gone through—all made her drowsy, and she had uneasy snatches of sleep, five minutes long each.

Ten, thirty-five—Dover. The great horse has stopped at the edge of the sea, panting, spent, and breathing hard. Muffled passengers stream forth, leave behind

the long row of blue chambers, lighted, warm and comfortable, at which they look back wistfully. Before them is raw discomfort—the indistinct shape of the great ocean, the cold night. Here are the twinkling lights of the little port, the obscure inns with open doors, and half lit-up; and the indistinct dark outline of the sea monster which is waiting alongside. Very clear, however, is the wreath of white steam against the dark air for the monster is blowing impatiently, like a whale in agonies.

In that rueful procession is the tenant of No. 90, with his hand-bag in his hand, and not very far behind, the muffled lady. All are presently got in, and batten down below. They are presently at sea.

Not a stormy passage—but fresh and breezy—all stretched below, like Moslems upon their carpets. One, thirty A.M.—Calais—lights passing by at each side, the long wooden arms of Calais piers enclosing them on both hands. Calais Customs, muffled soldiery, standing high up on a wooden framework, which is the pier; Calais porters, and what seems a gigantic hearse waiting ready to carry away the luggage.

Passengers stream out: Calais all asleep, or at most blinking drowsily. French steam-roc ready waiting, with wings furled, and fresh French blue cabins ready waiting, with open doors. Passenger array is all disorganised, scattered here and there, but mainly busy, in a brilliant glass temple, where meats and wines are being had. The late tenant of No. 90 is there, cheerful and talking jocularly to a stout Briton. He has his sack in his hand—and the muffled lady is not far away in the crowd.

There are now military French guards, with waists like ladies, "circulating" busily, and chanting "En voiture, Messieurs!" Away flutter "Messieurs," with unfinished sandwiches in their hands. The gentleman with the hand-bag enters voiture Numero Trente, where there is only one passenger, and immediately after him enters the muffled lady, and sits down at the far end. Then the great iron bird lays its breast to the wind, and begins to swoop through the French country. The cabin passengers drop away gradually into a weary sleep, for by this time they are very tired. But two of the tenants of Numero Trente are wakeful. Four, twenty-five — Amiens. Day beginning to break—greyness in the east. French country begins to open gradually. Drowsy passengers lifting their heads, look about them with a shiver. Seven, twenty — Full daylight — Paris. Place Roubaix, great hall of Northern Railway station—douane —blue-frocked porters, and general disorder. Gentleman with the hand-bag drives away in a cab, and the muffled lady, taking another, bids them drive with all speed to the Boulevard Mazas, the station of the Great Lyons and Mediterranean line.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STRUGGLE AND VICTORY.

Express at eleven ; so there is ample time. She takes stimulant of some kind, does the muffled lady ; and, strange to say, feels surprisingly strong, something.

The muffled lady waited, waited patiently the hour there was to wait. The Mazas station is the great threshold of the foreign world, the huge terminus whence all men and women turn their faces to the east and west. There the muffled lady saw natives of every clime and quarter pouring in at the gates as the hours wore on. But there was one whom she waited for anxiously who did not come. It was within twenty minutes. The iron horses were already harnessed. It now wanted but fifteen minutes — now ten. All voyagers were bidden to “mount.” The muffled lady looked out wistfully. At last a light fiacre, without luggage, is seen hurrying up at full speed. He has come *ventre à terre*, says the driver, pressing for an extravagant compensation. Barely in time.

The huge tribes of pilgrims have drifted away out of the huge *salle*, in upon the platform. The mountain of luggage, which had been piled up like rocks upon rocks by the waves, has again been swept away. Every one is settled in the carriages, save a few stragglers—notably the figure with the hand-bag, who rushes in panting, and who enters a blue chamber, “Numero V.,” where there is no one sitting, and establishes himself in a far corner. Five minutes.—Arrives a French lady—enters the same

carriage—and an officer, going to his regiment. One minute—and a muffled lady enters quietly, and shrinks into the shadow next the open door. The militaire already lays out pleasant pasturage for himself, and considers the ennui of the journey already far away. Eight thirty—they are gone.

It is the old routine over again. The pleasant French country, the pleasant French names, which sound in rich, mellow, fruity tones, like the old wines they stand for. A sort of bouquet seems to exhale from them. Montereau, St. Florentin, Tonnerre, Nuits, Dijon, Beaune, and Macon. Buffets here, there, and everywhere in delightful succession. From the windows the pointswomen, in uniform, in broad-leafed shiny hats, with a belt slung across like a cartouche-belt, and a flag in a scabbard at their side like a sword, are seen to present arms as the train passes by.

At Dijon the militaire departs reluctantly to join his garrison. He has made adroit efforts in the direction of the veiled lady, but without profit. He is more successful with the lady of his own nation.

The day goes by slowly.

It is now night—ten o'clock ; and here is the grandest of provincial towns—grand in its open places, its rivers, bridges, and tall houses — Lyons. Three hundred and sixteen miles.

Half an hour delay, and then go forward, still flying to the south, to the great Italian sea. In the same cabin are the same passengers—the English clergyman, with his little hand-bag, the muffled lady, and the French lady. A French commis voyageur gets in later, but passes away in an hour or so at Montelimar.

Midnight. *Train.* An illuminated palace, which is the first buffet. The French lady descends. And the French lady does not return. She lives a few miles out of Tours.

Remain only the muffled lady and the figure with the little hand-bag.

The muffled lady had not reckoned on this. She had looked up from an uneasy doze, and was bewildered. She rubbed her eyes. *Train* again rushing through the night. Now was the moment for action. But the door opens, and, in company with a cold, searching draught, enters the guard, asking for tickets. He is gone in a moment; and then the muffled lady throws up her veil and moves over to the other end. The other was sleeping — enjoying delightful dreams. He was fatigued, exhausted, and slept very profoundly. In his hand, and on his knees, was the little hand-bag he had carried so far.

Charlotte stooped down and looked at it closely. She saw that it was secured by but a spring. Very cautiously she leant lightly upon it, and it opened. And inside could be seen the precious packet. Quietly she drew it forth, put it by carefully in her bag, and closed it carefully. Nor must it be fancied that she did this with any air of guilty purloining; for as soon as it was done she leant over, and said, loudly—

“Mr. Wells!”

He started. For a moment he was bewiklered; then gradually collecting his faculties, he looked at her, and said with a scared voice—

“Miss Charlotte!”

He was confounded at this appearance. But his first

instinct, Charlotte remarked, was to grasp tightly his bag.

"You here, Miss Charlotte? What is the meaning of this?"

"I have followed you," said Charlotte, calmly, "in the same ship, in the same train."

"Followed me," said he, dropping his eyes; "why should you do that?"

"To save you," said she, "from a great disgrace, and to hinder an infamous errand."

He coloured. "These are harsh words," he said. "I know what my errand is; it is merely a commission with which I have been entrusted—nothing to be ashamed of."

"You are reduced low indeed," said Charlotte, sadly, "to become a slave, a tool in the hands of a cruel woman, and then to be driven by this miserable infatuation to plot the ruin of a family that never did you any harm."

He turned pale. "You speak in riddles."

"Ah," said Charlotte, "do you venture to say that it is a mere innocent object that is taking you down to Avignon?" She paused. "What have we done to you? Was not my father always good to you? Were we not always——"

"She never told me what this contains," said he, touching the bag, "or what it is for."

"But you know it. You suspect it. This miserable infatuation has blinded you. It has made you forget decency, gratitude, everything. Dear Mr. Wells, I know you are good and honourable. Renounce this degrading mission while it is time."

He stopped irresolutely, then shook his head. "I dare not. I have promised. I must go on."

"It will ruin us, blast my poor father's memory."

"I tell you I dare not," he said in much confusion. "Oh, Miss Charlotte, I am very wretched—a poor, weak, miserable creature," he said, after a pause, "but you must pity me. But I—in ~~fact~~—I could not return to her—I dare not—without doing what I undertook."

"And," said Charlotte, "you will perform so base, so unmanly a part?"

"No, no, dear Miss Charlotte, you misjudge. She is good, she is noble. She has suffered, but you must make allowance. I bound myself solemnly—indeed I did."

"Then," said Charlotte, slowly, "this is indeed infatuation. I could not believe you would have fallen so low. But you are scarcely accountable, and should be thankful that you have still friends who have saved you from this last degradation."

"Saved me?" he said, doubtingly.

"Yes, saved you, and saved us. Your errand is at an end. You will never deliver your packet, and—thank Heaven that you have been preserved from such a foul disgrace."

He gave a cry, and hurriedly opened his bag, and saw that his treasure was gone.

"Robbed!" he said. "Miserable man! what am I to do? You could not have done this?"

She did not answer.

"Ah! it was *you*! Come, come," he said, excitedly, "it must be given up. This is no child's play. I am serious, I can tell you, Miss Franklyn. Give me back my papers."

"I did not say I had taken it," said Charlotte calmly.

"It won't do!" he went on, with increasing excitement. "I swore I would carry out her wishes, and I shall. I undertook it, and shall do what I undertook. Come, Miss Charlotte Franklyn, I am not the old, quiet creature you took me for. No trifling with me, now."

Indeed, he did not seem like one that was. Never was any one so changed as this simple country curate. There was a fierce rude manner about him, that seemed to Charlotte to reach almost to ruffianism.

She had gone back to her end of the carriage. He went over to her. There was a truculent menace in his eye.

"I tell you I have no choice in this matter. I promised her. I am hers. For ever. I will go to the end of the world for her. I don't care who knows it, but I *do* love and worship her above every one. Oh, Miss Franklyn, forgive me! I know it is a wretched infatuation—it is making me miserable—and I speak to you like a ruffian—but—but—I *must* have that paper!"

Charlotte surveyed him with a look of deep contempt.

"I could not have believed this," she said—"such a change!"

There was a strange look in his eyes.

"Come," he said, "we can have no more of this. Give me back my paper at once. Take care," he added, getting up. "I am not to be——"

"Stop," said Charlotte; "you shall be spared the indignity of taking it from me."

She opened the bag slowly. In an instant he was changed.

"Oh, Miss Franklyn!" he said, falling back and

covering up his face in his hands. "I am a wretch—a monster. I blush for my own degradation. I am a lost, ruined creature, whom you are too good to speak so kindly to, but——"

Charlotte took out the roll of paper slowly.

"There," she said.

But in a second she had the window down, and the packet was plunged into the black, murky, roaring ocean of night below. "Now!" she said.

He gave a wild cry of rage and despair, and rushed to the door. Charlotte long after recollected the look of fury he cast upon her. But it was only for a moment. He had presently flung himself into his corner, and was giving way to passionate exclamations of despair.

"Oh! oh! How can I go back? how show myself to her? You have ruined me. She will cast me off, for her heart was set on this, and she had promised me to——"

Then he became furious again.

"What right had you? how dare you? It is open robbery. No matter, the law can reach you. Ah! what made you do it? What harm have I done to you? I shall never raise my head again."

Suddenly the train began to slacken its speed; it was going to stop. It was barely three or four minutes from the time the packet had been cast forth.

He checked the torrent of his reproaches. He could scarcely trust his senses.

"It seems like a providence," he said. "Ah, you have failed. You did not think of this. My dear Jenny will have her wish yet."

Charlotte was quite unmoved. She listened to him

calmly. They were entering an illuminated temple, lights flashing, and sleepless men standing along. The little telegraphic gong was tinkling merrily—as they are always tinkling in France—and a sickly yellow light played on the clock. Two, forty-five—Orange.

He had “descended” in a second, and in another was telling his story to the station-master. Valuable papers dropped from the carriage window—Reward. The first portion was listened to with polite abstraction, the second with eager attention. Antoine should get a lantern forthwith, and should walk back with monsieur. Such things often happened; they always found them again.

The up train was due in twenty minutes, and when it arrived the muffled lady took a fresh ticket, and went back towards Paris. At the very first station, however, she got down and went to some rustic railway inn; where she slept very sweetly.

But the curate and Antoine the porter trudged wearily back with the lantern, and sought for an hour or more. They could find nothing. They did indeed discover a large roll of English newspapers, which some Englishman must have flung out, and at the sight of which Antoine raised a joyful cry of discovery. But the precious packet they could not light on. It was no wonder; for the English newspaper was *Charlotte's*, and the packet was miles away under a certain pillow in a little rustic railway inn.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CROSS BEFORE THE NAME.

JENNY was now alone in her castle in Chesterfield Street, of which she was queen. All that day, it has been mentioned, she was in a marvellous state of excitement. She felt, as it were, at the last moves of a great game of chess—though, indeed, Jenny was likely to find that pastime insipid. She made some rapid play these last few days, and they seemed to promise successfully. She passed from the various chambers in her castle restlessly, and composed herself to steady sitting down, for it was now eight o'clock.

"He has left London Bridge," said Jenny. "He is on his road."

She was pleased with herself for this bold, dashing stroke, and was almost glad that the difficulties had arisen, which she could surmount so brilliantly.

"They don't know Jenny Bell quite, as yet," she said. "Yet, why could they not leave me in peace? I molest no one. It is their own concern if they meddle with me."

Then she thought of Charlotte.

"She chose to fight for Grey Forest with me. So be it. Let the best man win, as that foolish young Craven used to say."

In Jenny's private ledger there was a long row of figures, standing under that gentleman's name. Jenny felt herself ill-treated by him—insulted, and, what was worse, deceived. She laid out a pleasant plan for the

future, when she should have the pleasure, one of these days, of reckoning with him. Not just at present, for she had too many threads in her hand to wind off. But all in good time. She felt, indeed, like a little domestic sort of Napoleon, dealing with subordinate monarchs, all of whom she would deal with in their turn. It was only a question of time.

She passed a pleasant evening castle-building, and even followed her emissary as far as Calais. Then she went to bed, and slept sweetly.

The next day was a day of action, and seemed very long. She wanted news. She wished to hear of something—of somebody; but patience was the only thing. She went out to walk, came in again, went out to walk again. Her envoy was far down the fair land of France by this time. Great issues seemed to hang suspended in the air all round, and she felt their weight upon her breast. The evening drew in; four, five, six, seven; dinner.

It grew dark earlier than usual, for the day had been gusty and stormy; and the skilful admiral who divines the coming of winds and tempests had been busy telegraphing to all the coast. By dinner-time it had pretty well set in: blasts were sweeping round the corner, windows were beginning to clatter, and stray slates to tumble into the street with a musical jangle. There were all the pronounced symptoms of a rough night.

Jenny noted these as she tripped in to dinner, and gave a little shiver. She was very thankful. She was not exposed to the fury and discomfort outside, like the poor people whose proper lot it was. There was an excellent fire in the dining-room, and perhaps on the

whole she would as soon have the storm continue; for, by the contrast, her own sense of comfort was wonderfully increased.

As this was a sort of festival time, a little feast was not inappropriate. A light German wine, sparkling, something French from the French *café*, in the next street, and a pigeon. Jenny enjoyed it, but somehow was growing nervous. She soothed herself with agreeable images of dominion. She thought how she would have a conservatory on her stairs, new curtains, and some French furniture—a Louis Quatorze clock. How she would gradually too, work her way into a certain order of society—not so much the richer cream, but the lively, the witty, and artistic. Men of this stamp she would gather about her—little suppers—she the *Récamière*—queen of the society. Every one should talk of the piquant Lady Maxwell. This speculation brought to her mind a person up stairs, who rather stood in the way of those pretty pictures. Jenny sighed. Patience was the only thing.

It came to ten, to eleven. Jenny stirred up the fire, and cast on a log. She always had logs: she thought it so much more cheerful. She determined when Grey Forest was being probably refitted, she would have handsome mediæval “dogs,” for the better burning of wood.

That led her on into the most delightful of speculations. It was a very capable mansion, and offered opportunities for the most picturesque decoration. She thought how pleasant it would be to put it altogether in the hands of Brackets, the great Birmingham mediævalist, who would hang up his coronas, and put in armorial shields in the windows. Jenny had the greatest taste for this sort of

thing, and had actually, for her own private amusement, purchased all the colours and models for the pleasant pastime of illumination ; though it must be said, she was not skilful at the work. Grey Forest had great capacities. It might be laid out in terraces,—little bit of ornamental water—fêtes—ah, yes—the very thing. Something new for these old-fashioned fogies of the country. Lady Maxwell's Fête!—what music in the words.

Then she thought of Charlotte. "Poor little Jenny!" said poor little Jenny to herself, in a sort of tranquil admiration, "you are very, very clever—you are a match for all these good and noble people. No money, no friends, no help, and yet little Jenny has done all this for herself. She has fought her battle with men and women, and has beaten."

Her round eyes kindled ; she gave a start, for the wind came bursting violently round the chimney, like the fall of a heap of stones—it woke her from her reverie. She went over to a little drawer, and took out one of her "Letts' Diaries," an old one. She had to search for it.

"It is a long time ago now, but it is a wonderful deal to have done in the time. I can scarcely believe it. The whole tribe of them pulled down—*she*—all of them on the ground." Jenny turned back the pages, until she came to one on which her eyes rested tranquilly. "That little cross," she said ; "I may almost take it out, now, or write 'paid' opposite—like a bill." The humour of the notion pleased her, and she actually wrote, "paid" opposite this entry, whatever it was. A long time ago," said Jenny, shaking it to and fro so as to dry it—"a very long time. And yet I have had wonderful patience—

suffered too," added Jenny, pensively; "suffered a good deal. And yet I feel no bitterness—none in the world. I can afford," said Jenny, with a pleasant laugh, to be indulgent. Why not? Everything is coming out exactly as I wished it to come out. I think that pauper creature has often repented the hour she interfered—and thought she interfered so cleverly—with poor helpless little Jenny."

It was twelve o'clock. She heard the chime of a fashionable chapel close by, giving out that hour. But the notes came to her through a terrible hurly-burly of boisterous storm, and tumbling slates, and clatter on the windows, as though some one were lashing them with awful whips. It was a wild night. The meteorological Admiral had forecasted rightly. The black "Drums" were up at every port, and the next day, the leading journal had a dismal series of reports, headed "Deal," "Holyhead," "Dover," all chronicling a dismal story of ravages and wrecks. Jenny thought of her messenger. "Poor Wells!" she said, with a smile; "this will be in waiting for him when he returns." But it was not so much matter now. For his work must have been done by this time, and done successfully.

She thought of the packet of M. Bernardi's novels, the string of which had not yet been cut. She opened them abstractedly. The old story, "*La Femme du Diable*," "*Le Mariage et la Mort*!" "*Aspasie*," "*Les Amours de la Comtesse d' * * **," and the rest. The banquet was more than usually piquant, and yet Jenny was not hungry. The meats lay there untasted. It came to half-past twelve.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JENNY'S^e LAST BATTLE.

JENNY now thought she would go to bed. She lit the candle tranquilly, and went up stairs. She thought of the sick lady as she came near to her own door, and counted her among the enemies who were banded against her. Jenny thought how she would reckon with all, in the fulness of time. She felt her strength and passed on.

The wakeful lady heard every step. The door opened softly, a few inches wide. The long wasted face peered out curiously.

"Well, Jacky," she said, in a whisper—her eyes were growing dim latterly—"Jacky dear, what was she doing?"

So the miserable cub was below stairs, spying on her again—listening—watching! Jenny now, long outraged, blazed into a fury. She went boldly to meet her enemy.

"Oh, ho!" said the lady. "Miss Bell, is it? What have you come from doing now?"

"Ask your son, your precious," said Jenny, halting before her. "Nice offices you set him to! You bring him up nicely! But I tell you, Ma'am, I won't put up with it. When the master of this house comes back——"

The wife of the master of the house burst into a loud

of laughter. "Oh, listen to her. How grand! What a deal of power you have here, to be sure! Take care, my good girl."

The sneering way of this woman latterly, always made Jenny's blood boil. Latterly, too, she had begun to think her dangerous, and not to be despised.

"What do you mean?" said Jenny. "Do you think I mind your threats?"

Again the other laughed.

"You feel quite secure. Of course you do. You know everything that is going on. Of course you do!"

"I do," said Jenny, "and shall match you all yet."

Again the other laughed.

"Of course you think *he* is on your side. You know what *he* is gone away for. Of course! And he will come back and take the governess's side. Of course. But I can tell you, my good girl, *your day is over*. He shall know *you* by-and-by."

Jenny trembled all over with rage. But with the rage was a sort of terror. She always thought this creature was dangerous.

"What fine threats! This is all false," she said—"false every way."

"Is it?" said the other, with something like a shriek—"is it? I know what you think. You have planned it all! I am a weak, ailing creature—dying every day. Half out of my senses, too. I know your game. But I am strong—strong enough to match you. I tell you I have watched you all along, and know everything you have been about."

Jenny was beside herself with fury. The lamp she

held in her hand showed the lines of her round face, working in a sort of contortion. She had strong passions, had Jenny. She would hardly trust herself to speak. So she walked straight from the landing into the room, and confronted her enemy there.

"Infamous creature," she said, "I tell you these are calumnies—false, every one of them."

"They are true," said the other, fiercely. "Who was it stole the deeds, this very day? Ah! you see! Who was it sent away that wretched tool of yours over to France? You see we know everything! The despised sick woman! Who was it used to steal out into the park and meet gentlemen? Who wrote gentlemen letters, ridiculing their master—the master of this house—whom they were cringing and flattering the next moment? Oh, we know all about you. The game is up, my lady, you have been very sly, but there have been others as sly. Your hand is spoiled, my fine young lady. All your little arts and tricks have been seen. And the poor creatures that have been thought so stupid, all along—one sick, another a child—they have been able to match this very clever lady. It is capital! Look here," she said, with a glance of fierce triumph, taking something from under her pillow. "Look here—you know *this*!" and she waved a strange mosaic-looking letter, all patched, and pieced, and pasted across—indeed no other than Jenny's own note to Mr. Craven, rescued from the basket, its shreds carefully, and with infinite pains, put together. The note, alas! in which she had spoken so unguardedly of her patron—Sir Frederick.

"Ah, my lady!" the other went on, furiously, "we have you trapped now, and as sure as Sir Frederick

Maxwell comes to to-morrow, he shall have this in his hand, and a whole journal of your doings day by day——
Oh !”

She caught her side with a sudden start.

“Oh this heart,” she gasped. “Never mind,” she added, “I can bear it. I shall live to see you ejected yet, my fine Miss Bell.”

Jenny’s lips moved, but she could not speak. She was confounded, overwhelmed, and seemingly scared. The sick lady revelled insolently in her triumph.

Jenny then turned away, and looking at her with a sort of terror, left the room, slowly. She descended the stairs as slowly, and seemed almost stunned. At the first landing she stopped, and remained, with her eyes fixed steadily on her lamp.

As she stood there, she might, indeed, have felt that all her castles were tumbling down in ruins about her. The game did indeed, seem “up,” and Captain Jenny’s army was getting into a rout.

CHAPTER XIX.

DEFEAT !

SHE went back to the dining-room slowly. The storm was raging. Rain and wind beat furiously against the great window on the landing. Jenny fell into her chair quite scared. She was terrified, confounded. Here was failure at hand, in that very council chamber, where only a few moments before all was success. Worse than that, not only failure but exposure.

* * * * *

For a quarter of an hour she sat there with her eyes on the glowing logs. Failure, certain failure it was ; and a certain exposure she could not get beyond. There had been a plot—a hideous, unmanly plot—in which all had been concerned—the wretched boy—the wretched woman—(Jenny stamped her foot furiously)—and that—yes—*she*—that hateful Charlotte, too—*she* was at the bottom of it all. And was *she* to win at the end ?

* * * * *

Suddenly she recovered herself. A strange light flashed in her eyes. She lifted her head. She hurried up stairs swiftly.

The windows on the landing clattered accompaniment as she passed.

She entered her enemy's room again.

The sick woman was lying down—panting, exhausted,

and the smile of victory was on her lips. A dull lamp, was upon the drawers. Jenny measured her, and drew her lip into the coldest and bitterest shape.

"Come back again!" said the sick lady. "What do you want here? What! not heard enough?"

"They are false," said Jenny, speaking with a deliberate slowness, and keeping her eyes fixed steadily upon her. "False, infamously false—everything you have said; and you, and those who are working with you, know it to be false."

The other glared at her. "Ah! wait until to-morrow," she said, "and you will see!"

"Aye, so we shall!" said Jenny, in the same tone. "You have told me what you have been doing to ruin me."

"Ah, exactly," said the other, eagerly.

"Well and good. But," said Jenny, "do you suppose I have been idle? Do you suppose I have worked for nothing, or have been scribbling away whole nights long for nothing—for the pure love of law? Ah! my good lady; do you follow me?"

The sick lady said nothing. She began to breathe a little.

"Those long nights," continued Jenny, with the same cold eyes still upon her, "in your husband's study—how were they spent, do you suppose? Do you imagine I have not been putting my labour out to interest? Do you fancy I have not made myself secure? Am I like a mere drudge? What do you say, my good lady?"

The other raised herself upon her elbow, and began to look at Jenny much in the same wild astonished way that

Jenny had done at her. But she was pressing her hand tightly to her side, which Jenny had not done.

"Do you suppose I am a sort of fool? I tell you," said Jenny, drawing a step nearer, and speaking the words as though she was discharging a series of arrows, "I am not to be *stirred*. I laugh at your poor, feeble, little spy system. I am safe, secure—*immovable, whether you live or die.*"

The wretched lady, now sitting quite up, and gasping terribly, was trying to speak. But Jenny—

"They have deceived you. Poor miserable imprisoned woman, what could *you* expect to do? My security is in the folly of weak man. He is *my* slave. Do your worst," said Jenny, drawing nearer, and putting her face quite close, and stabbing her with her words; "Sir Frederick knows *me*, and *I tell you*," said Jenny, bending close down to her and tipping what she spoke with a cold venom, "*we can bide our time!*"

The other started into the air with a shriek and a sudden spasm. She sank back and rose again with shriek after shriek. She rolled and grovelled on her pillow in agonies.

Jenny rang the bell and went to the door. "On her own head be it. It is her own work."

"*Now*," she said, as she opened the door, "I may be the queen of Grey Forest yet."

Standing there was Sir Frederick Maxwell and his little son. Jenny's heart sank, for there was a stern purpose in his face, which showed that he knew all.

"Wretched girl," he said, hurrying past, "what have you been doing?"

The unhappy Lady Maxwell was still writhing and

shrieking in terrible agonies. It was as though some one were stabbing her and stabbing her again; for she seemed to be striving to catch at the spectral sword that was entering her side. Winged messengers went off to the east and to the west for doctors, and presently came a plunging of horses; and the great physician, disturbed at a fashionable feast, came hurrying in. Later, too, another great physician came, with reeking horses, sprang from his carriage, bounded up stairs, and met his brother. They gave some weak lenitives. The wretched lady was still being stabbed. But even while they stood there the sword was driven in, as it were, up to the hilt; and with a gasp, and a shriek of agony, the soul of Lady Maxwell passed away.

That was about two o'clock in the morning. No one in the house took rest that night. Miss Bell had not witnessed the last agonies of the lady of the house, but kept within her room. She, too, did not sleep, nor indeed go to bed. But early when the morning was breaking, a servant came to tell her softly that she was wanted in the parlour. He found her cold, shrinking in a corner, scared and frightened. Sir Frederick wished to see her in the parlour.

The morning was gloomy and miserable. The wax-candles on Sir Frederick Maxwell's desk, by which he read his briefs, were lighted. He sat there like a judge.

"I know all," he said, "and suspect more. Knowing so much as I did, I was guilty myself in leaving this house. I should not have been away half an hour. Heaven forgive you!"

He paused a moment, then added. "And forgive me too."

Jenny was settling rapidly in an attitude of piteous grace and entreaty. Yet she was not the old Jenny. "Sir ——" she said in a mournful cadence, exquisitely touching.

"Sir——" said Jenny.

"Hush !-hush !" he said, waving his hand impatiently. "It is useless trying more of this imposture. It is profanation to the dead. You must leave this house within an hour. You are a terrible creature. I don't know how to speak to you—but go !"

Jenny bowed her head, and retired without a word. She silently went to her room, and in half an hour had got her things together. In the grey of the morning a cab was brought to the door, and she was driven away from the house of death out into the world.

It was hard upon that poor outcast. She had fought courageously, and should have won. Still she is young, and has the world before her. A month will help her over this repulse, and put her in heart for fresh battle.

It is easy to speculate how it is to fare with the other characters in this play. Charlotte and her young Craven, stately "coming round," as it is called, within a few months ; and Cousin John Hall, the *Deus ex machina*, or rescuer, watching the settlements. Franklyn's home again at Grey Forest, beautified and full of glory. Bells ring out, and villagers harness themselves to the coach of this blissful pair.

There were but two with whom it has fared ill. The rejected curate, now on the verge of starvation, skulking about ; and poor, luckless Jenny Bell, who

has been plunged into the dark, surging London waters. This was but a passage from her youthful life. She has the will for many more adventures. But she is sure to emerge later—on the surface too—with the same old spirit, and a memory keen as ever.

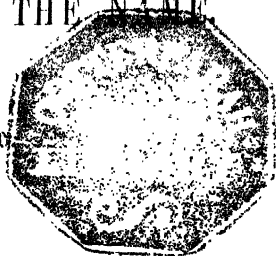
THE END.

BELLA DONNA;

OR,

THE CROSS BEFORE THE NAME.

A Romance



BY

PERCY FITZGERALD,

AUTHOR OF
"TWENTY-FIVE, BROOK STREET,"

"NEVER FORGOTTEN,"

"COLLEY,"

ETC.

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